A PILGRIMAGE

JOHAN BOJER

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A PILGRIMAGE

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BY

JOHAN BOJER

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN

BY

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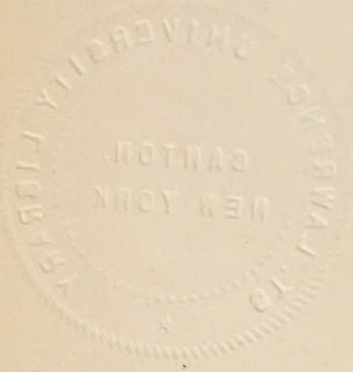

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BOOK ONE

A PILGRIMAGE

I

The old maternity hospital up in Akers Street in Christiania is an unsightly two-storied building, standing in a treeless garden. It is a venerable house, however, being at least a hundred and fifty years old; and during this period thousands of women, in sorrow or joy, have sought shelter beneath its roof, so that if the old building could relate its experiences there would be many a strange tale among them.

One sunny day in March, 1878, a husband and wife stopped outside the building and pulled the rusty iron ring of the gate-bell. The gate opened, and they passed through the empty garden into the courtyard, where the snow and mud lay steaming in the sun, and

diffusing, in combination with the hospital air, an unpleasant odor.

The porter came to meet the new-comers with a spade in his hand and, on their asking for the professor, pointed to a door in the yellow left wing, saying that at this hour he was generally over there with the steward.

The man left his wife in the yard and hurried up the stairs to the steward's office, but the next minute returned with the information that the professor had gone across to the doctor in charge. The porter leaned on his spade and pointed to a little red-brick house standing by itself near the other wing, saying: "Well, that 's where the doctor is"; and the man hurried across.

On his return, however, he was quite angry. "What nonsense this is!" he exclaimed. "The professor is now going his round of the wards with the students!"

"Then you 'll have to wait for him up there in his room," said the porter, rising from his leaning posture on the spade, and pointing to

a stair in the gray stone building to the right of the gate. The man sighed and betook himself thither, his wife preferring still to wait out in the yard.

This time the man was gone a long while, and his wife began impatiently to walk up and down. The time seemed long because of the anxiety with which she was filled as to the result of this visit. She was over forty years of age and had at last given up all hope of a child of her own; and now they had agreed to adopt a child from the maternity hospital, where the choice was so large and where they could at the same time do a good action. More than a year before, the professor had been intrusted with the matter, but it had proved to be a by no means easy task. In the first place it was to be a healthy, well-formed child; in the second place the mother must be healthy and well formed; and in the third place the mother must agree to the conditions laid down by the adoptive mother. It was not until the previous day that the professor had summoned

them in the belief that he had found what they wanted.

And now the little boy was lying behind one of those windows. What would he be like? She would see him in a few minutes, and perhaps take him away at once. But might he not have inherited some mental defect? Would he be a real son to her? Much might happen with a strange child that one all at once took to one's heart like this.

She walked up and down in the sun, turning impatiently toward the door through which her husband had disappeared. The air grew worse as the sun rose higher. Blankets and mattresses were being brought out from the wards, to be beaten among the trees in the background; and all the time the melancholy hospital smell oozed through the walls of the great silent buildings, seeming to tell of sad things that happened behind the dark windows.

A piercing shriek sounded from a room on the first floor, and was repeated again and again. The lady went up to the porter, who

was hacking up the ice in a frozen gutter with his spade.

"Who 's that shrieking?" she asked.

The porter leaned upon his spade, blinked at the sun, and smiled at the simplicity of the question. "Who that is?" he said. "Well, it 's not easy to say, for shrieking goes on here day and night all the year round."

At that moment the lady's husband called to her to say that the professor was waiting for them in his room.

For a few minutes the courtyard was empty. The porter had disappeared, and his spade stood leaning against the wall; water dripped from the eaves, and a starling, perched upon the roof-gutter, whistled gaily with his yellow beak raised toward the sun. Suddenly a midwifery pupil, with sleeves rolled up, came running across the yard, crying, "Porter! Porter!" and immediately the porter's gray head appeared at a door.

"Well, what 's the matter?" he asked irritably, speaking with his mouth full.

The girl stopped and involuntarily lowered her voice. "The doctor wants you in No. 10."

"Very well, but can't I have something to eat first? What does he want?"

"There 's a dead body to be brought down."

"All right, I 'll come!" and he disappeared once more within his door.

At length the gray-haired professor and his two visitors appeared at the top of the steps, all three in friendly conversation. Here the professor stopped and said, "But if you positively must see it at once, my dear lady, we shall have to go about the business diplomatically; for I suppose it 's still your intention not to let the mother know who you are?"

They both answered, "Yes, it is"; and the lady added:

"When once I 've taken it as my own, I must feel quite sure that it 'll be mine only. The mother might want to come and see it, and there the child would be with two mothers! She might have relations, too, who would want

to interfere and—— No, thank you! That would n't do at all!"

The professor nodded and said: "Well then, you must do a little acting now. And be careful, my dear lady, not to forget your part when you see the little cherub."

He had led them across the yard and up some more steps, when suddenly the lady placed her hand upon his arm and said in a low voice:

"But you 've not told us yet who the mother is, professor."

The professor mounted another couple of steps before he stopped and said, also in a low voice:

"Up to the present she has refused to disclose both her name and where she comes from. We call her No. 47."

"But are you quite sure she 's willing?"

The professor looked down with a self-confident smile. "I think," he said, "I 've acquired a certain acuteness in judging this

kind of individual," and he nodded as if to himself. "If I 'm not mistaken," he went on, "she 's the unhappiest of them all. Well, now we 'll see."

He moved on, preceding his companions along a dimly lighted passage, past a number of doors bearing numbers. At one of these he stopped, and, opening it, said in an unnecessarily loud voice, "Well, we may as well look in here, too."

He allowed the visitors to pass in before him. A peculiar sickly-sweet odor met them. The room lay in a dreary half-darkness, because it faced the north. The first thing they made out was two rows of beds with their heads to the two long walls of the room, and the next, two rows of faces and eyes turned toward the new-comers. Three babies were crying at once, and their mothers were hushing them. Some of the patients were sitting up in bed, a few nursing their children, while others lay in a kind of torpor, pale and exhausted with sufferings recently passed through. Nearest

to the door a woman, fully dressed, was lying outside the bed and rose on the entrance of the visitors.

The professor stopped and addressed her. "Well, what have you done with your baby?"

The girl, whose broad, fat face was of a yellowish color, answered calmly, "Why, it died three days ago!"

"Ah, yes, I remember now! That was yours, yes." And he was passing on when the lady turned to the girl with interest in her tone. "I suppose you think it was a good thing your baby died."

The girl looked down. "Oh, yes, it was the best thing that could happen."

The professor remarked in a matter-of-fact tone, "And you 've had three before, have n't you?"

The girl looked at the lady, as if it were she who had put the question, and answered quietly, "Yes, three."

"Are you in service?" asked the lady with a sigh.

"No, I 'm a bookbinder."

They moved on, and the girl once more lay down on the bed with her hands behind her head.

All eyes had turned toward the strangers and were gazing at them with that peculiar mixture of envy and admiration with which the inmates of a hospital ward regard the visitor. These two had come straight out of the sunshine and fresh air and brought a little of the light and air in with them; but in a few minutes they would be going out again and might stay out there as long as ever they liked.

The professor had stopped at another bed, and the lady wondered to herself whether this was the mother; but when she came close she saw, to her disappointment, that the head on the pillow was old and gray-haired.

"This was a bad case," said the professor in a businesslike tone. "She 's forty-five, and it 's her first confinement."

Seeing that the patient was asleep, the lady

whispered: "It is n't her, is it? She 's a married woman, of course."

The professor shook his head. "No," he said with his strange smile; "she 's not married." When he saw how painfully the lady was affected by the fact of an elderly gray-haired woman's having an illegitimate child, he took her by the arm and led her across to a bed in the middle of the opposite row, saying, "Come here and you 'll see something even stranger."

A woman with pale, distorted features lay in this bed laughing, laughing incessantly, while she clasped her baby in her arms. When she saw the professor she began to talk volubly and incoherently, and foamed at the mouth; but her large, watery eyes beamed with a strange joy.

"She 's not only mentally defective," whispered the professor, "but her knees are drawn up to her chest, and she 's been like that from her childhood. And yet she 's a mother, as

you see! A great many things happen among us Christians that you good ladies who sit and knit stockings for the heathen never dream of!"

The lady looked as if she were about to faint, and had to lean on her husband's arm as she whispered, "It surely can never be she!" She had only one thought.

The professor again took her by the arm, however, the confident smile once more on his face. "Now come here!" he said, "and I 'll show you something beautiful. I see she 's asleep."

The lady felt that this was the mother with whom she was concerned, and her heart beat fast with excitement.

The professor took her to a bed by the window. Although the blind was down, the light shone through, giving a reddish glow to the pillow, on which lay the head of a young, strong-looking woman, asleep. Her thick, dark hair was unconfined and flowed over the pillow, disappearing beneath her shoulders;

and her head was bent tenderly down over the baby that lay sleeping on her arm.

It looked as though sleep had stolen upon her unawares while she was nursing her child, for her night-dress was still open and revealed a firm white throat and a breast big with milk. She looked about twenty-four or -five and her face, with its regular features, would have been pretty if it had not been so sallow and weary-looking.

But it was at the child that the lady looked, at first with a critical feeling, as if it were something that was to become hers. The baby was also asleep. Its comparatively large head with the thin hair was both refined and healthy-looking. One fat little hand lay outstretched on its mother's breast, and now and then its little mouth moved as though still sucking in dreams. Its cheeks were two round balls. It was really like a little cherub, a delicious little morsel to hold up to one's cheek and cuddle. The lady involuntarily began to smile.

So this child was going to be hers, although it now appeared to be sleeping so securely beside its real mother. The little garments in which it was dressed were poor and patched, the hospital's well-known rags for poor babies, and were not quite clean, either. The lady felt a desire to take the child away at once, wash it thoroughly, and dress it in the pretty little clothes she had lately been occupied in making.

But now she had to look at the mother, too, who lay in happy sleep with her child on her arm, without a suspicion that beside her stood another woman who was going to take her child from her. For the space of a moment a little wave of sympathy welled up in the lady's heart. Would it not be a shame to separate these two?

But instantly she fortified herself with her old argument. This girl would have to part with her child in any case, for it would be a disgrace to her as long as she lived. Like the girl bookbinder, she would regard it, after the

first little grief was over, as a piece of good fortune if it died. Why not just as well give it away once for all to one who would be a good mother to it, give it away and bury it in her heart as if it were dead?

Suddenly the sleeper's eyes opened, and for a few seconds the two women looked at one another; but the next moment the lady drew back involuntarily and turned her eyes to another bed.

The professor maintained his self-possession and said cheerfully: "Well, you *have* had a sleep! How 's the little one?"

Without answering, the girl pulled the clothes up to her chin and turned her face away. The baby awoke and began to whimper, and she hushed it with bent head; but a deep flush of shame overspread her face.

As the lady left the room, she turned at the door to give a long look at the bed by the window. It already seemed to her as if she were parting from her own child.

When they once more stood in the yard, she

asked the professor whether he thought it was wrong not to let the mother know what became of the child.

"She will have a perfectly free choice," he replied. "In the first place she can have time to consider the matter, and in the second *I* shall certainly neither persuade nor threaten her. We shall see what happens."

As the three passed through the old gateway, the lady began to discuss a way, with the professor's help, of also doing something for the unfortunate girl.

II

THERE are many ways of being tired. Happy people sleep soundly from weariness, but it is also possible to be so tired that even when asleep one feels it like a bad dream and is wakened by it. It was thus with No. 47, the girl by the window. She had again fallen asleep for a moment, but on waking felt more tired than ever.

In so large a room with many babies, rest was not easy to obtain. If her own child were not crying, one of the others was, and often several were screaming at once; and the more worn out she became through want of sleep, the less able was she to bear noise, and the angrier she grew at being awakened again and again. When it was her own child she was in despair, but when it was one of the other women's she would suddenly become so enraged that she had to clench her teeth. During

the seven days she had lain there, she had hardly slept for half an hour at a time, and now her head felt so strangely heavy and her eyes could not bear the light, while the hard, uneven mattress was like a rack to her body, and her back pained her continually. Of late, too, the slightest unexpected agitation caused her to burst into tears, notwithstanding her efforts to keep them back.

She now raised herself upon her elbow and, peeping under the blind, saw that the sun no longer shone so blindingly on the opposite roofs. She therefore pulled up the blind and lay gazing dully out at the yellow evening sky as it reddened over the distant wooded hills behind the town. It was better anyhow to look at that than at her immediate surroundings, although she was beginning to wish she had another window out of which to look; it would have been good for her eyes, perhaps. From this one there was nothing to be seen but the same walls and chimneys and ugly house-backs, the same excrescences on the

roofs, one of them like a crouching cat. The day before there had been a patch of snow on the roof of the Law Courts; to-day it was gone. Far down in the town a church-tower was being built, and she often turned giddy at the thought of a workman perhaps falling from it. And then there was that great, glaring "L. B. Hansen, Wood-engraver," in gold letters on an iron frame high above a house-roof down in the town. It had been there yesterday and it was there to-day, and it worried her; and yet she kept trying to spell the words backward as she lay there. Things might happen in the other beds, but what did she care about them? She knew what it all looked like. All eyes were turning to the door now, because they were expecting supper and had a faint hope that this time there would be something nicer than they had had yesterday.

Some one touched her arm, and on turning her head she found a midwifery pupil standing by her bedside. No. 47 looked anxiously at the girl, who pushed a small purse into her hand,

and stooping down whispered: "Ten *kroner!* They would n't give any more."

No. 47 looked at the purse as if she could not believe it, and whispered, "But it was a gold watch!"

"They said it was so old."

No. 47 laid the purse on the window-sill, saying with a sigh, "Well, thank you for the trouble you 've taken!"

When she was alone again she lay for a little while looking straight before her, and then, putting her hand under her pillow, drew out a folded handkerchief and proceeded to count the coins that were wrapped up in it. No, there was only eight *kroner,* and these ten made eighteen; but the hospital account would be at least twenty-five, and the possibility that had of late tormented her day and night again presented itself: would the hospital authorities compel her to give her name and address in order to obtain their money?

She put the silver back into the purse, which she placed under her pillow, and then lay with

her white hands outside the bedclothes and her eyes fixed on the ceiling. "Well," she thought at last, "my winter coat is quite good, so perhaps I can get ten for that, too, and it won't be long before spring comes. If I can only get away from here all right, it does n't matter what happens afterward."

This thought completely reassured her, and her eyelids closed once more. It was so tiring to think, and all her thoughts were so sad and bitter, that she *could* not think any more.

Now the door opened and two midwifery pupils appeared, each bearing a tray with supper for the patients. It was the same porridge and bluish milk as usual, and involuntarily the numerous expectant faces turned away.

The plates and cups of milk were dealt out. Some of the women were still so weak that they had to be fed with a spoon, while others sat up in bed and ate their portions with the good appetite usual with women in such circumstances.

No. 47 lay looking from one woman to another. Who would have dreamt a year ago that she would now be lying among the poorest class of patients, in the company of women, most of whom had been brought in from the gutter.

The setting sun was sending its last slanting red rays through the window, throwing a mottled patch of light upon one of the walls, while the rest of the large room receded into shadow, the figures in the beds being scarcely discernible in the gloom.

In one far-off corner sat a girl of eighteen, already asking for more. "Oh dear!" she said merrily. "Won't any one sell me their share? I 'll give a *krone* for it!" She wore one of the coarse, yellowish-white hospital nightdresses, and over her shoulders flowed masses of beautiful red-blond hair that caught gleams from the sunbeams whenever she bent forward to hold out her plate.

One of the pupils had stopped beside a

patient who refused to eat and would only lie and sob. She was a common street-walker, whose child had died the day before of a congenital disease; and to the surprise of every one the mother was inconsolable.

"Eat your porridge now!" said the pupil. "It 'll all come right, you 'll see!" But the girl only drew the clothes up over her head and sobbed more loudly.

"Just let me have her plateful!" cried the girl in the corner. "And then I really think I should be quite as satisfied here as in the workhouse."

There was a clattering of plates and spoons along both rows of beds, and the usual dissatisfaction with the food began to make itself heard. A peasant girl, who had only come in and been confined the day before, but who already felt quite well, held out her milk-cup to the nurse while she stirred the milk with her spoon.

"Do you call this milk?" she cried. "In the

country we call it sky-blue!" And she threw a spoonful out over the floor and put down her cup.

"Nice behavior this!" said the nurse, putting her hands on her hips. "Perhaps you 'd like me to complain to the professor?"

"Yes," said the girl; "do go and fetch him! I 'd like to ask whether the cows in these parts give water."

A sharp-tongued working-woman now joined in. "Oh," she said, "we can't expect anything better here, for we 're no better than dirt, and it does n't matter much if our babies die. But the ladies in the fine wards lie on silk and down, and the cream on our milk is wanted to feed them with. We 're not all treated alike in this world."

Words of approval came from the various beds, and the girl in the corner, who had not got the extra porridge she had asked for, now began. "Ah, yes! It 's the same with the food as with the professor. He treats us like dogs, but he goes on his knees to the fine ladies

and kisses their hands, and gives them strengthening medicine both outside and in, ha, ha!"

The girl bookbinder with the yellow face now joined in. "And upon my word, it 's none so certain that these fine ladies get their children any straighter way than we do, that I 'll be bound!"

This remark met with approval, and many laughed; and through their harsh laughter came the sound of the subdued sobbing of the street-walker, who still lay with her head under the clothes.

There was one strong young married woman among them, the wife of a working-man, and she seemed to be the only one in the room who was contented. On the table beside her bed lay all manner of good things that her husband brought her every day—apples, oranges, chocolate, and cakes. Whenever she ate any of them, she almost choked when she felt all the eyes fixed upon her; but there were too many women to share things with.

The attention of all was now drawn to the deformed woman. Her baby had been surreptitiously taken from her while she was being given her supper; and no sooner did she discover this than she forgot her supper, held out her arms, and began to whimper, this slight agitation causing the foam to rise once more to her lips.

The girl bookbinder began to laugh at this, and standing by the deformed woman's bed, she said sarcastically: "So you think they 're going to take your child from you so that you can be spared both the shame and the trouble, do you? Don't you be afraid! They 'll let you keep it—ha, ha, ha!"

The poor creature in the bed, however, did not notice that she was being laughed at, and she still lay with outstretched arms, whimpering. She had always been mad, and had often bitten her lips until the blood came; yet now she had suddenly become a tender, careful mother, and it was evident that anxious fear for the future was beginning to mingle with

the dawning intelligence that the maternal instinct had awakened. For who could tell whether her baby would not be taken from her when the relieving officer came to arrange for their board and lodging?

At last the nurse brought her baby back, and once more she hugged it close in a careful, tender embrace, and laughed—laughed incessantly, as if otherwise her bosom must burst.

No. 47 had forced down half her porridge and sent what was left to the girl in the corner. When the plates and cups had been collected and carried out on the trays, the two pupils turned up their sleeves and began to make all the babies ready for the night. A third came in with a basket of newly washed baby-clothes, which she proceeded to hang up in front of the stove, as the things were not dry. The stove was hot, and the clothes began to steam and soon filled the room with a suffocating smell of washing and soft soap; and the air did not improve as the seven babies were undressed and their soiled clothing was thrown in a heap

beside the hot stove. Several of the women held their noses, others coughed, while the babies, under the pupils' businesslike handling, filled the room with a fearful clamor.

It seemed as though the pestiferous atmosphere worked every one up into a condition of impotent fury, which only began to find expression when the children were brought back to their mothers. The sharp-tongued working-woman laid down her child in front of her and exclaimed: "Well, I never! Do you call this clean? Just you look here!" And she beckoned to one of the pupils. When the girl came to her, she burst out about these baby's clothes that were supposed to be clean, but had only been dipped into water, smeared over with soft soap, and then dried at the stove. And when things like that went from diseased children to healthy children, was it to be wondered at that so many died of infectious diseases?

Other women lay and sniffed at the clothes, and the dissatisfaction soon turned into abuse. The pupils looked at one another and then be-

gan to make excuses for themselves, saying that it was neither of them who had done the washing this time; it was some of these fine town ladies who had never dipped their fingers in water before. But what did that matter to the mothers, even though the nurses had had to admit that they were right? The storm burst, and some of the women lay scolding and swearing and shaking their fists at the ceiling, while the atmosphere of the room kept them coughing. No. 47 lay with her hands over her ears; it was dreadful to listen to.

When quiet was at length restored, those mothers who were able nursed their children; and while their pale faces looked down at their sucking babes, remarks were again exchanged about the fine ladies in the better-class wards, who were treated differently. If it be true that one's earliest convictions are imbibed with one's mother's milk, these little ones must surely have become anarchists.

Most of the children, however, were fed by hand, and for them a pot of steaming boiled

milk was brought in and placed in the middle of the floor.

A pupil came up to No. 47 and said, "Is yours to have milk this evening?"

"Yes," answered No. 47 with a weary movement. "I don't think I can give him any more today." The girl took her baby, and soon all three pupils were seated around the pot, giving the babies milk with a spoon, while the babies cried and the milk often went down the wrong way.

When No. 47's child was brought back to her, she caught hold of the pupil's wrist, exclaiming, "Do you know what you 've done?"

"No!" said the girl. "Was it wrong to feed the child?"

"You first used the spoon for that child with a horrid disease, and then you fed mine with it without washing it first. You must be mad!"

"Pooh! That 's of no consequence," laughed the girl, pulling her hand away. No. 47 took her handkerchief and began to wipe out the child's mouth; but again her tears

broke out, and she turned away so that no one should see. A little later she once more lay with the sleeping child on her arm, looking out dully at the yellow evening sky. The sun was gone, and darkness was rolling up from the town making the house-roofs look black.

In her exhausted condition she was filled with dread at the thought of another night to be gone through. The air in the room became more and more unbearable. Her throat was very dry, but when she drank from her mug the water was quite warm and tasted of soap and nearly made her sick. The pupils gathered up the soiled clothing and, either through forgetfulness or indifference, left the room without airing it for the night. There was still an intolerable heat from the stove, and the patients lay perspiring in their beds.

Upon the departure of the nurses, the usual conversation began among the patients. The girl bookbinder related her experiences from previous visits to the hospital. On one occasion a pupil had neglected a woman who had

just given birth to a child, and the woman bled to death and was found dead in her bed. Once two women were confined simultaneously, and in the hurry the two children were placed in the same bed; and when they came to take them up, no one knew which was which, so each mother had a child given her at random; and three years later they agreed to change. A young doctor went straight from a post-mortem to examine a woman, and the woman was infected and died. And so the bookbinder went on, story after story, the one worse than the other, while it grew darker and darker in the comfortless room, and No. 47 drew the clothes over her head so as not to hear any more.

III

"Sleep! sleep! There 's no use in thinking any more about this now! Sleep! sleep!"

No. 47 kept her eyes shut but tossed about incessantly. It was past midnight. The sound of regular breathing came from various beds, snoring from one; a baby woke and whimpered; the street outside was quiet; everything indicated that it was night.

But it is just when one is too tired to sleep that thoughts have most power, always the gloomiest thoughts, the same as last night and the nights before that; and strange visions glide past in the darkness.

Now she was lying in the gutter, but there was a little sunny land somewhere out in space where she once wandered about and was different from what she was now. Other little golden lands appear and glide past. Each recollection has its special landscape, and in all

of them she herself was as it were the center of a great, variegated setting.

First there was the little island off the coast, and the lighthouse-keeper's little house where she had grown up. Then she was in the midst of luxuriant east-country scenery, and so much happened there. Then appeared a dark attic in Christiania, to which she had been chained as in a prison. But then faces began to glide past—men, women, friends, and others for whom she still felt hatred.

Suddenly she sat up, reached over for her neighbor's watch, and held it under the night-lamp. Ah, it was only two! Would the night never end?

She lay down again and, shutting her eyes, drew the clothes over her head. Sleep! sleep!

But in a little while she was again in fancy on the little island where her old parents still lived in the lighthouse-keeper's house, with no suspicion of anything being wrong.

She turned over and groaned. The next minute she was once more a girl of fourteen

running about the island with the fishermen's children. The sea roared around them; to the west it met the sky itself on the horizon, while to the east the mainland lay like a black line between it and the sky. On the rocks around all kinds of sea-birds had their nests and were so tame that she could stroke the back of an eider-duck without startling the bird. She went with her mother to the little church, along the road that wound among the peat-bogs and rocky hills; and on the whole island there was only one tree, a little stunted birch growing in their own garden.

She and her two brothers had lessons with their father. He had a large library, and she soon learned to read books in foreign languages. Her parents were so different—her mother gloomily religious, her father given to drink. He had had the misfortune to be removed from his position as an officer in the navy and could not forget it.

Then the sons went wrong. The elder was imprisoned for forgery; the younger left a

good situation in Christiania, and ran away with a circus-rider. Her mother took it all as a cross sent by Heaven; her father's hair turned white. Now she was alone again with her father and mother, doing everything for them as for two invalids, and feeling it the most natural thing in the world that she should give them happiness in return for the sorrow her brothers had brought them.

When she was twenty-two she was still tending her father and mother, with just as little idea of what her future would be. No one ever came to stay with them, and she began to feel her solitude like a lifelong imprisonment.

It was then that a wealthy aunt with an estate in the Mjösen district invited her to spend the summer with her. Her father held his pipe between his teeth as he muttered, "Then they have n't turned their backs upon us altogether yet!" It was an opportunity to escape from her cage for a little while, and at last her father yielded. That was last spring. Yes, fancy! only a year ago!

She sat up in bed again and, covering her face with her hands, murmured: "Oh dear! why can't I sleep?"

Again she lay with half-closed eyes and saw herself at the big farm, filled with impressions from a day or two spent in Christiania. The farm and its buildings stood upon a slope and were reflected in the great lake surrounded by fertile lands and spruce forests. It was June, and the garden was full of blossoming apple-trees, and the grass in the meadows waved in the summer breeze. The fresh sea-air to which she was accustomed was now exchanged for the scent of grass and leafage and flowers of all kinds. She would sit for hours leaning out of the window of her little room, bathed in the warm night air. A yellow moon hung above the lake, but it never shone, for the night was never dark enough.

How was it that from the first she felt a dislike for both her aunt and her two cousins? Was it because she feared they would look down upon her on account of her father and

brothers? For the thought of them was always like a raw spot that she could not bear to have touched. At last she was certain that they pitied her. The raw spot was continually being touched—by glances, by hints, by tones, which perhaps also referred to her clothes and manners.

She swallowed her indignation, for she did not intend to go home yet; but the hiding of her indignation soon turned it into hatred. Drop by drop it gathered in her mind, but it, too, had to be concealed, and she thus learned hypocrisy; and as she did not want to wound her parents, she wrote only cheerful letters home and thus learned the art of lying.

Her aunt kept a good deal of company, and she soon noticed that people thought her pretty, prettier than her two cousins of about her own age. A wealthy farmer proposed to her, and also a veterinary surgeon. She refused them both. She began to dream of looking higher, not only in order to make her parents happy, but because she wanted to be

above her cousins and be able to take her revenge.

And then *he* came, a relative of her aunt's deceased husband. He had just taken his medical degree and was very well off, it was said. Fancying that he showed a marked interest in one of her cousins, she began to think him handsome. "I 'll take him from her," she said to herself. "But I must be careful."

He brought life into the house. There were mountaineering expeditions, bonfires in the forest, jingling of glasses, laughter and bright eyes. What a summer! Until then she had said her prayers at night; now she forgot them.

He must have noticed, however, that she was of a commoner race, for he would hardly have gone in to one of the others that night when they two were at home alone.

The following day she felt as if they were more than engaged: in a sense they were wedded. She now looked at her cousins without hatred; she would not revenge herself but only triumph.

They used to meet in the forest, and the weeks passed joyfully. She was bright and happy, and when she thought of her parents it was with glad dreams of the good time in store for them when they came to live with her.

Then he went away suddenly. She did not manage to speak to him when he left and felt uneasy. She waited and waited for a letter, and then she wrote; but no answer came.

Then one day at table she heard that Dr. Folden had long been engaged to a Christiania lady and was shortly going to marry her. Oh! that day! That day!

She again sat up in bed, passed her hand across her forehead, and whispered, "I shall go mad if I don't sleep!"

Her neighbor, the gray-haired woman, was also awake, and whispered in response, "Do you think you 're the only one that feels that?"

She made no reply, and while she sat with her head supported on her hands, there came before her a vision of that night when she was wandering about the fields. The darkness of

autumn had begun, and the grass was wet. A dreadful foreboding had come to her, and suppose it were true! Suppose it were true!

When morning dawned she dragged herself home, but during the day she went about her occupations as usual, singing and laughing. The others must not notice anything; no, they should not have that triumph!

At last she was certain that the thing she feared was true: she was to become a mother. When with the others she was still gay. No one should have the faintest suspicion. Necessity taught her to laugh instead of weep, and made her inventive and stoical. There must be some way out of her difficulty; if not, she would have to make one.

But where was she to go now? Home? And inflict this further blow upon her parents?

One day she sat down and wrote home the gayest of letters, asking for money to go to a school of domestic economy in Christiania. The money came, although her father grumbled. Then, in order to prevent her

aunt or cousins from looking her up in town, she quarreled with them before she left, so that they parted in enmity.

Like a wounded animal she hid herself in the town. She attended the school of domestic economy for a month, but dared not go longer, for fear suspicion should be aroused. She took a lodging with a sewing-girl in an attic, and sat all day long sewing coarse clothing, though it brought in scarcely enough to pay for her board and lodging, and her little hoard was diminishing. She dared not go out for fear of meeting acquaintances from the country; but she wrote bright, cheerful letters home to her parents, one falsehood invariably leading to another. It was a long winter.

Then came the evening when she slunk along the streets to the maternity hospital and sat talking to the assistant physician in his consulting-room, while pains began to rack her body. He wanted particulars to enter in the books, but she obstinately refused to give either her name or her station.

She was then compelled to have a bath, and finally found herself in a hard, evil-smelling bed. Never in her life before had she dreamt that any one could be so lonely and unhappy.

Then began the worst of all. Two students came and began to examine her. At first she thought she would die of shame; then she grew angry and exclaimed: "Is n't it enough that one of you does this?" to which one of the students answered almost sarcastically:

"You must excuse us, but we students are here to learn. It looks as if you 've not been taking sufficient exercise lately," he added.

"They take me for a street-walker," she thought.

The pains continued for fifteen hours, and each time they came she could do nothing but cry, "Mother! Mother!" In the intervals she lay gazing up at the painted ceiling with its gas-lights and their unpleasant smell.

Later in the evening two midwifery pupils came in on night duty. They also had to examine her for the purpose of acquiring knowl-

edge, and later on they brought in two other girls for the same purpose; and after them came others, both male and female students. She was no longer a human being; she was simply a subject, to be treated with no thought but that of making use of her, even if it tortured her very soul. And there she lay, unable to protest. It was dreadful.

In the course of the night another case was brought in, and an hour later yet another; and the three women lay there screaming, with only a screen to separate them from one another. The cries of the other two went through her.

Later that night the assistant surgeon was sent for, and he, too, had to examine her, while he held forth to the pupils on duty on the subject of this special case. Afterward he came again with an instrument and said to her with a smile, "Now I think we 'd better get this over!" and set to work, the pupils looking on with interest; but then she became unconscious.

When she came to herself, she was surprised to find that she was alive. The other two were

still lying screaming; but suddenly she heard the cry of a little child, and instantly felt as if she were being borne by angels, and that the air was filled with music.

"Let me see it!" she exclaimed. "Is it well formed? Oh, let me see it!"

"May I congratulate you on the birth of a son!" said the student who was attending to her; and when the little one, after being washed and dressed, was laid upon her arm, she burst into happy tears.

As soon as she came into this room, however, she had awakened to the sad reality. At first she had not the heart but to choose to nurse her child herself. In such surroundings she was unable to eat much; but thanks to her healthy constitution, nature was able to supply sufficient milk for the child, but at the expense of the mother. Whenever she had nursed her baby, her back seemed ready to break, as if the little one had sucked away her spinal cord; so she had to begin to wean it.

Afterward these long, sleepless nights, fears

for the future and gloomy memories of the past, little by little robbed her of all the joy of motherhood. Her bed was a rack, which she nevertheless dreaded having to leave; for where was she to go?

Once more she lay back upon her pillow, as a yellow streak of daylight began to spread over the town. "Oh!" she murmured. "I cannot go through another such night. I shall go mad!"

IV

"Well, madam, have you had a good night?" It was the professor going his morning rounds, accompanied by doctors, matron, students, and pupils.

"Yes, thank you, pretty good," said No. 47, with an attempt at a smile. The professor was unusually kind to-day.

He looked a little skeptical and took hold of her wrist while he looked at his watch. "We-ell," he said, "this is n't up to much." And turning to the matron, he said: "I say, there 's an unoccupied room close by here with only one bed. Could n't we take her in there this morning?"

The matron looked a little astonished, but nodded; and the professor smiled at No. 47, bade her a kind good morning, and continued his round.

There was a great commotion in the room an

hour later when she was made ready for the move; and as she was supported to the door and said good-by to the others in their beds, she felt their eyes gleaming with both curiosity and envy. Why should *she* suddenly be treated better?

She was taken into a bright room with a south aspect. It was so clean, and the air so pleasantly fresh; and there were clean sheets on the bed and pretty red blankets. A feeling of well-being filled her when she lay down. There was a cradle for the baby, and in a little while a cup of chocolate was brought to her. What in the world did it mean? Was it not a misunderstanding?

At about dinner-time there was a knock at the door, and the professor entered alone. He seemed to bring with him an atmosphere of good spirits, and she felt so grateful to him for what he had done for her that she involuntarily greeted him with a smile.

He sat down by her bedside, clasped his hands together, and looking toward the win-

dow, said: "I 've come to speak to you about something that you don't need to give me an answer about to-day. What do you think it is?" He smiled and nodded as though to himself, and continued:

"Now I don't know who you are, but I 'm an old stager and fancy I have some idea. Perhaps you 're married; you probably belong to better-class people. Perhaps you 're not married; I don't even want to know whether you are or not. But what do you say to your little boy becoming a prince in some little kingdom or other, eh? I mean supposing a really kind, well-to-do, childless couple asked to have your child as their own, would you have any great objection?"

Once more he smiled and nodded to himself, and then turned to look at her. She was accustomed to wear a mask before the professor and never show any emotion; but now she could not help turning red. She thought he was joking.

"And now you yourself," he went on. "You

too might be all the better for going into the country, for instance, and getting roses in your cheeks again. And if the circumstances were such that you perhaps required a little ready money to get started at something or other—it 's possible, is n't it?—well, there 'd be a way to manage that, too. The people I refer to are rich, and I 'll guarantee that the boy will be a little prince. Well?" And he folded his arms and looked questioningly at her.

No, it could not be a joke! Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. It was so long since she had heard a sympathetic word, and it had all come so quickly and unexpectedly. Had it been sent from heaven? She began to cry.

"There, there!" said the professor, stroking her hair. "It 'll all come right in the end, you 'll see. Just you think it over until to-morrow." And he got up and went out.

It is only when the light is turned on that one realizes how dark it had been before, and it is only when help comes that one clearly sees one's miserable condition. She, who yesterday

had her mind filled with the darkest thoughts and did not know how she was to pay the account here in order to get out—she— No, it must be a dream! She involuntarily rubbed her eyes as she said to herself: "What are you crying for? Can't you understand you were dreaming? You must be in a bad way now!"

If this were the case, the dream still went on, for immediately after a nurse came in and asked whether she would like claret or beer with her dinner. She must be one of the better-class patients that the others had talked so much about.

When her dinner came, with a clean cloth, table-napkin, and nice things to eat, she suddenly felt inclined for it and wanted to get well quickly and be young again. The sun shone so brightly in here, and a nervously excited feeling of happiness made her laugh and cry both at once. When you have lived for a long time in a pitch-dark cellar, it only needs a single sunbeam to dazzle you.

During the afternoon she tried to consider

the professor's proposal. But after all what was there to consider? She was lying in the gutter, and a man came and wanted to help her to get up. There had been moments when she had told herself that she would do away with the child when she came out; but now they had come and said, "We 'll make him into a little prince, and though you 've got yourself into difficulties we 'll help you up again." Was it likely that she would say "No"?

When the professor came the next day, there was only one thing about which she had any hesitation. The people in question must not ask who she was.

The professor was sitting with folded arms, and now stroked his chin and gray whiskers as he smiled to himself.

"That 'll just do," he said. "For neither do the child's new parents want you to ask who they are." And he laughed as if that were a trifle.

She felt a little stab in her heart and made an effort to look into this; but she had already

so accustomed herself to the thought that it was all good fortune, both for her and for the child, that she was anxious not to discover anything to the contrary. She *would* raise herself; she *would* be saved; and she agreed to everything.

The professor rose and pressed her hand. "Well," he said, "I think they 'll send for the little prince to-morrow; and at the same time there 'll be a sum of money placed at your disposal, of which you 'll not be required to give any account." He laughed, and she could not help laughing, too. He then spoke a little about the further weaning, examined her breasts, which he found satisfactory, and left her.

She lay with folded hands and a smile on her face. A number of bright, cheering words echoed in her brain—"money," "freedom," "salvation." There was a God, then, after all!

In her happiness she thought she could now afford to take pleasure in her child during the few hours that were left. She took him into

her bed and let him sleep upon her arm; and through the long, bright afternoon she lay smiling down at the little face. He was really like her father. When the nurse came to dress him for the night, she insisted on having him for a little while in bed with her while he was quite naked. It delighted her. The suppressed maternal feeling awoke and flamed once more in her heart. Her tears fell fast; it must have been because her baby was now to be a child of fortune and live comfortably.

Then came the hour on the following day when the child was to be fetched. The hospital clothes were taken off, and new, embroidered little garments were put on, and he was given to his mother for a last farewell. She held him in her arms, the poor child in rags having been changed into a rich man's child who was hers no longer. She glanced at the little garments. They were hand-stitched; the new mother must have made them, and henceforth this unknown woman would make everything.

She kissed the child and tried to laugh.

"Good-by, then, baby!" she said. "And be good to your new parents. Perhaps we sha'n't see one another again. Won't you give me a single smile, you bad boy? Good-by, then!"

When he had been carried away, she lay for a long time gazing at the door that had closed, and then, drawing the clothes up over her head, she began to sob.

As if he had foreseen all this, the professor now came in and, taking out of his pocket a bundle of bank-notes, he roguishly pushed them under her pillow. "I congratulate you," he said with an encouraging smile as he sat down beside her and stroked her forehead. "You 're fortunate, I can tell you, and the child still more so." And he began to tell her how very different was the fate of most of the children born in the hospital.

He then asked her whether she would allow the new parents to decide what name the child should bear. As a rule the babies were baptized in the hospital, but these people insisted on having the christening in their own home;

so it would have to be as they wanted. Well? She answered as he wished her to do, namely, that she would leave it all to the new parents, and the professor nodded and stroked his chin complacently.

"And what about yourself?" he inquired. "What do you intend to do when you leave here?"

"I don't know," she said, drying her eyes.

He once more nodded to himself. "I understand," he said. "You don't want to begin going about at once; you need a year so as to forget."

She smiled trustfully. This man understood everything.

"Now, if we could find you a good, nice place, for instance as housekeeper to a rich Norwegian widower in a wooded district in Sweden—could you undertake such a post?"

She could not go home for a long time, she thought, but perhaps this would do; so she thanked the professor, feeling that everything that this wise man suggested was very good;

and he left her after once more stroking her hair in a fatherly manner.

At dusk a few days later, the thin, pale woman stepped into a carriage that was standing at the gate of the hospital. As it drove off, she looked back at the gate and the low buildings in the empty garden. It seemed to her that she had been in there for years. There were still young women lying there, and they would soon be having their supper of porridge. The deformed woman! The gray-haired one! Would she ever be able to forget it all?

The streets were noisy. She was being driven out to the seamstress with whom she had lodged before, and where she had left her things, and would perhaps stay the night there.

Late that evening she was sitting in her attic, writing a bright letter home. "Dear Mother," she wrote. "I have now finished at the domestic economy school, and I will tell you what I am going to do. The head mistress had been instructed to give the best pupil a capital place in Sweden, in a rich, childless

widower's house, and she chose me. I wanted to earn a little money, and besides it was an honor. I hope you won't be angry, but I accepted it. I shall come home in a year's time, and will then be nice to you both. I inclose a little present for you, mother. I was given a little of my wages in advance." And she wrote on in the same style.

When the letter was finished she sat looking straight before her. Would there never be an end to these falsehoods? Every lie cut her to the heart, and yet they were necessary. She could not kill her parents.

She went down and posted the letter, and bought some buns and milk to take back with her. She meant to have her supper in bed. Oh dear, how nice it would be to lie in a bed that did not smell of hospital!

When once she was in her old den, however, with its hangings of dirty cretonne, she forgot her supper; her eyelids fell, and she sank into a great, empty nothingness, in which it was delightful to rest. In the morning she awoke,

raised herself upon her elbow, and ate two or three buns; and then, sinking back, she once more fell asleep. In the evening she thought of getting up, her breasts were so distended and painful; but when she had eaten a little and drunk the milk, she once more, almost without knowing it, sank back on her pillows and slept. At last, at last, she could sleep in peace!

V

One day in April she was sitting by a window in the train as it ran southward through the province of Smaalenene, past farms and brown snow-flecked fields, and now and then across flat country covered with low fir woods, that lost itself in the rainy horizon as in a gray gloom.

She had spent the last few days in buying some clothes, for which the five hundred *kroner* she had received came in very handy. She could now make her appearance in a decent manner. She was also beginning to feel well and rested again, the professor's prescriptions of malt-extract, stout, and new milk having in a short time restored both her spirits and her strength.

At last she was leaving this town where she had lived in constant fear of being discovered and where she had gone through so much. Of

late her gloomy reminiscences of the hospital had haunted her like a bad dream out of which she was unable to awake. She would start up in the night, imagining she was still lying in the big room, and was cold with fear until she found that it was only a dream. But now the train was carrying her away from all her unhappiness, from all evil memories; and when finally the Swedish tongue sounded in her ear she breathed freely with a sense of being set at liberty. Now no one knew her story; now she could look every one in the face; now she was going to begin a new life in a new country.

While the train was crossing the Swedish plains, she sat with closed eyes, leaning back against the cushions. The feeling of being on her way from the darkness into the light filled her with a continual feeling of happiness. Anxious thoughts might be at hand, but they had no power. For a whole month she had not heard from her parents, but that might be accidental. She meant to be happy now. As though by a miracle she had been saved from

shipwreck, and why should she not be happy? Here in Sweden she would be respected, she would be comfortable, and every evening she would write to her parents, only the truth, only loving words, and that was almost the same as being with them. It would be so nice!

She turned to look out at the country, where the sun was beginning to shine upon wet fields and trees. Every light effect had of late always made her think of her child. Perhaps after all she ought to have decided what he was to be called—Carl, Herman, Olaf, or . . . and she began to think of all the prettiest names.

To be able to think continuously of a thing, one must have a setting to it, and gradually it became her fixed belief that the child was at Christiansand. The man was probably the governor—tall, well dressed, with white whiskers and gold-rimmed spectacles; and his wife was fat, severe, and dressed in silk. Once these two wanted a son, which she—she had borne them. And as her thoughts ran on about

this child, her mind became filled with a strange feeling of well-being, and she smiled without knowing it.

She arrived at her destination at about midnight. It was a small town, and the street-lamps were already extinguished, the little wooden houses being only just discernible in the moonlight. A carriage and pair were waiting for her, and in a few minutes she was sitting with her things around her, driving along a broad highroad.

The road ran through a thickly wooded valley, at the bottom of which flowed a noisy river. The wheels hummed upon the frozen ground, and the ice crunched under the horses' hoofs as they sped along. After driving for an hour or two, they came to some large factory buildings, with their tall chimneys towering above them, and then to an entire town of workmen's houses, and finally turned into a broad avenue, at the end of which the house came into sight.

A feeling of oppression made the girl's heart

sink within her. How could she manage this large house? What a foolhardy adventure she had embarked upon!

Light was visible in a single window, which was almost hidden by the trees in the garden; but when the carriage drew up at the entrance, a man came out, and, introducing himself as Herr Flaten, the master of the house, offered her his arm and led her into the dining-room, where the table was spread for a meal. Here he begged her to be seated, and sat down himself to keep her company.

They had scarcely sat down when he suddenly broke off his inquiries regarding her journey and said with a smile:

"But do you know I 've not yet been told what your name is?"

She felt her color rising, and bent over her plate as she answered:

"My name is Aas, Regina Aas."

It was long since this name had passed her lips, and it seemed quite an event to her; but Herr Flaten raised his glass and clinked with

her and then began to ask about news from Christiania.

He was a man of about fifty, fat, bald, and with a gray mustache below his aquiline nose; but his eyes were kind and his manner straightforward. He told her he was from Hamar and when a young man of twenty became a clerk in an office in Spain, where he had been fortunate. A few years ago he had bought this property for the sake of the forests; but since his wife died last year, he had lost interest in it all and was now inclined to sell it and move back to Norway for good. Regina forgot that he was a stranger to her. His spontaneity put her at her ease. He treated her without either condescension or distrust, and that again was something new and pleasant. But now something occurred that she had not expected.

They had just risen from the table when he passed his hand across his forehead and said thoughtfully:

"Aas! I suppose you 're not the daughter of a naval lieutenant Aas whom I once got to

know in Barcelona? He was on a Norwegian man-of-war there." And he fixed his eyes upon her.

In a moment the thought had flown through her mind: "He must not know! Perhaps he has heard something through the professor, and who knows what may happen!" She had suddenly become frightened but, accustomed as she was to dissimulation, she answered quite naturally:

"No; my father was a farmer."

"Indeed." He had turned to fill his pipe, and, while standing with his back toward her, he continued as if to himself:

"Well, to tell the truth that was a stupid question to ask, for only yesterday I read in the Norwegian papers that this same Lieutenant Aas had died as lighthouse-keeper somewhere on the coast; and if that were so, you would hardly have been here now."

Regina leaned against the table for support, and a voice within her whispered, "Mind you don't faint!"

Herr Flaten lighted his pipe and then fortunately looked out of the window for a moment, pulling the blind aside in order to do so.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "Well, now I hope you 'll be fairly comfortable here, Fröken Aas. But talking of that lieutenant, he was a gay, thoughtless fellow, I can tell you, and some day you shall hear some funny stories about him!"

He turned back to the room and started a little when he looked at her.

"But I say! Well, the best thing you can do is to go straight to bed, Fröken Aas. You 're rather done up with your journey. The maid will show you your room." And he shook hands with her, wishing her good night.

VI

THE miner is happy as long as he is on his way up toward the light. The light comes to meet him, and the darkness sinks lower and lower beneath the cage in which he is seated. But when he gets out in the light of day and begins to mingle with the free children of earth he notices that they can all point at him and say, "That's a miner." He may change his clothes and wash thoroughly, but the marks of his hell underground still stick to him inexplicably.

Regina's thought when morning came was that it was impossible for her to stay in bed that day, as it would arouse suspicion. She must not only go down but must also look as if nothing at all were the matter.

She was sitting with her unpacked clothes around her. Again and again she rose, but always sat down once more with her hands in her lap.

As long as she was on her way up from her hard necessity, she had been filled with joy at being saved; but now—now she once more had firm ground beneath her feet, now she was like any of the others; but for that reason she could see all the more clearly what had happened. Why was she obliged to unpack? Why not go home to her father's funeral and stay with her mother? She felt it was quite impossible, and yet she rubbed her eyes and could not believe it. What had happened? How had she come here? Why must she remain in exile? Why was she not the old Regina Aas? She had passed through a dark valley and now stood once more on the hilltop; but why should she therefore be a totally different being?

In a few minutes she would have to go down-stairs and act the part of a young, innocent girl, laugh as in olden days, be young and gay. Well, she would manage that; but what about happiness? She had dreamt that here she would begin to be happy, and now she would have to struggle daily to preserve her

secret, just as she had done when staying with her aunt. And mother would have to live on alone, and she herself would have to pretend nothing was the matter and show a pleasant face. That was what her happiness would be now.

She rose and made herself ready to go down. On taking a last look in the mirror, she saw that despite careful bathing her face still looked swollen with crying. She dipped the towel in cold water and pressed it upon her burning eyes. It made them look a little better. She smiled into the mirror. Yes, that would do. No one should guess that her father was now lying dead and that perhaps he had heard something about her before he died.

When she went down, Herr Flaten had gone to his office. Two maids were at work in the big, bright kitchen, one of them being elderly and a Norwegian. The draft-holes in the stove showed a ruddy glow, and on the walls hung all kinds of kitchen utensils, spotless and shining, the whole being up to date,

clean, and really dainty. The housekeeper whose place she was taking had breakfast with her and then took her all over the house, giving her the necessary information; and by dinner-time she had left.

Regina had dinner alone with Flaten in the large, bright dining-room. He did not say much but ate quickly and then went into a small room adjoining to have a nap. From the window she could see down the dark, thickly wooded valley with its scattered farms and the smoke rising from their chimneys. Yes, she thought, it was pretty certain that her father had heard everything and then died. He could bear no more from his children.

The days came and went. While she went about the house it was necessary that she should not sink to the floor, and just as necessary that she should smile and be gay, as was befitting for a girl of her age. These strange eyes were extraordinarily suspicious, and if once they obtained a glimpse of her inner self they would see it all at once.

So she joked and laughed with the maids and showed a bright face to Flaten.

At eight in the evening he would come home, tired and silent, and after supper would once more shut himself into his wife's little boudoir with a book, his pipe, and a glass. Regina could see that he still lived in memories of his dead wife, and that this boudoir of hers was like a little temple, to which he resorted to meet with her again. The house was a very quiet one. Now and then Flaten might have a business acquaintance to dinner, when the conversation was of nothing but timber, forests, and foreign markets. He seldom went out himself. Regina was thankful that he never asked her about her relations or her home. The management of the house was entirely in her hands, and things gradually began to go smoothly.

At table one day Flaten raised his eyes from his plate and looked at her for a moment.

"I don't think this place suits you, Fröken Aas," he began. "I really think you get paler every day. To-morrow I 'm going to make

two or three calls, and you can come with me if you care to. You 'll be able to make a few acquaintances."

Regina assured him, however, that she was very well, and moreover had not time to be away from the house just now. The excuse was rather clumsily made, and she felt that he still looked at her now and again; and from that day she had a feeling that he had her under observation and wanted to find his way into her secret.

At last a letter came from her mother. It appeared that one must have gone astray, for this one told her about the funeral and reproached her for not having come home.

She could not discover anything suspicious between the lines. She was thankful to find that her father had heard nothing; it was not her fault that he died. She could therefore indulge her grief and could sorrow over him with a happy sorrow that was not associated with any bad conscience.

Her room was on the second floor of the

large house. The wall-paper was blue, and there was a single picture hanging on the wall, an engraving representing Napoleon before the burning city of Moscow. In the light spring evenings she sat in a little rocking-chair by the window, looking out at the undulating, fir-clad hills rising one above the other until the last was lost in the golden light of the evening sky. Sometimes she rested her elbow on the window-sill and her chin on her hand, and the rocking-chair stood still; then it suddenly went on again, then stopped once more as she fell into the same attitude. That is how a prisoner would sit and look out. The noise of the factories had ceased, and only a thin smoke ascended slowly from the tall chimneys; and in the silence the river sang its monotonous song.

What had happened? Could she no longer adorn herself for a young man, and why did she no longer dream of the day when she would be a bride? What had happened? Could it never be done over again?

The days went on, and while she wore a mask of happiness, she was always on her guard, first against herself that she should not forget to play her part, and then against every one else.

He who has something fateful to hide is always suspicious. Now and then Regina thought she noticed something in Flaten which indicated that he knew everything. It continually filled her with secret terror. She was constantly on her guard, weighed every word that was uttered, took it up again and weighed it once more. It gave food for much pondering.

Why had that cross professor picked *her* out as a subject for sympathy? Was he in touch with her relations? Had it come to the ears of her relations? Was this a play being acted behind a curtain that she had not the power to raise?

Suppose it were a relation who had adopted her child. She had a childless aunt in Nord-

land. Was that why she was not to know what became of the child?

Thought and conjecture followed one another. They accompanied her from room to room as she went about her occupations. They kept her awake. They brought her rocking-chair to a standstill and set it suddenly going again.

Why should the professor have chosen a Norwegian widower in Sweden? Did they want to get her out of the country? They probably thought she would stay there and forget the whole thing, even the child, and would never return; and thus, thank goodness, they would be rid of her!

Things had gone so far with her; would they prove to be right?

She began to feel the assistance she had received more and more humiliating. Strive as she would, it was still to the charity of others that she owed her position here. She was a fallen woman who must put up with everything if only she could obtain her daily bread.

Had it gone so far? And suddenly she would flush crimson and start out of her rocking-chair with clenched hands.

But she could only sit down again. There was nothing to be done—yet, in any case.

Why should all this befall her? Why? Why? Was it an evil destiny that no one could defy?

The spring was advancing. The swallows built nests outside her window. The flowers wove carpets of many hues over the fields running down to the river. The sun grew hotter every day.

There were nights when she sat up in bed and said half aloud: "No, there must be an end of this. I must sleep! I will shake it off; I will sleep!" And with lips compressed she would lie and compel her thoughts to hold fast to some trivial thing, until she awoke in the morning to find that she had slept for several hours. She felt it as an encouraging victory; and just as she compelled herself to sleep, so she began to compel herself to eat. Her youth

rebelled against unhappiness, just as a strong constitution throws off an illness.

The spring became summer. In her leisure moments she began to work in the large garden. The air was filled with the fragrance of grass and leafage, and the fruit-trees were laden with blossom. Sometimes it was all so quiet that she forgot where she was and thought she owned this little kingdom herself and was far away. The birds sang above her head; they were being hatched in the nests under the roof of the big house. The branches closed behind her, and she sat down on the grass, seeing only leaves and blue sky, and hearing only the voices of birds and the distant roar of the river. The whole world with its evil memories seemed to be far away.

One Sunday evening she was wandering about in the garden when some one was standing on the veranda watching her. It was Flaten, but she did not see him and was walking quietly up and down, dressed in a light,

loose-fitting dress and with a large shady hat upon her dark hair.

"Upon my word!" he thought. "She 's a fine woman!"

He had noticed of late that she had been looking better and had more color; and without thinking much about it he had begun to take longer over his meals, because in her company his spirits rose and he could forget both business worries and sad memories.

He now called to her, "Fröken Aas!"

She looked up almost in fear. She had not expected him home yet and felt as if she had been caught in some wrong-doing. As she came across the grass, her cheeks glowed beneath her shady hat, and she smiled a little anxiously.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, and stood waiting at the foot of the steps, leaning upon her rake. He had called her without thinking, and for the moment did not know what he was going to say.

She was beautiful as she stood there. The hand that held the rake was brown and shapely. The sleeve was drawn up and revealed a round, white arm, covered with soft, golden down. She had the dazzlingly clear complexion peculiar to young women who have recently given birth to a child, and at the same time the summer had given it a touch of sun and health. The sharp features had become rounded, and the secret suffering had given a look of spirituality to the strong face. As she stood there in her light, loose dress, with the green trees for a background, her eyelids dropped and she drew patterns in the sand with the point of her shoe while she waited.

He had to say something at last.

"Fröken Aas," he began, "I 'm afraid you must be terribly bored up here. To-morrow I shall be going to Gothenburg for a few days, and if you care to come with me, it will be pleasant company for me, and you can get a little fresh air. What do you say?"

She looked down at the point of her shoe and

considered a little, then raised her long lashes and smiled.

"I say, 'Thank you very much!'" she said, involuntarily blushing a little.

When going about with him in the streets of the large town, however, her old fear came over her of meeting some one she knew at the next corner. She laughed at herself but did not succeed in laughing it away; it followed her like her shadow.

On her return home she realized that throughout the trip she had been unable to enjoy herself. While she went about her daily occupations here, bright moments would often come unexpectedly; but for her to go of her own knowledge and will to seek amusement like any one else—— No! Unhappy memories crossed and barred her path. If she traveled to the ends of the world, they would go with her, always go with her.

The rocking-chair stood still. "And yet," she thought, "I tell a hundred lies a day to hide it all. Would it be much worse if I tore

away the mask?" But the mere thought made her spring up, crimson with emotion. Never! She must bear it. Her mother must not have this sorrow. And she herself? Was she not humbled sufficiently?

Flaten's manner to her became more and more marked. Now and again she was perplexed at the look in his eyes. His care for her became almost ridiculous; and whenever he returned from a journey he brought her presents as though she were his wife.

Then an uncomfortable thought occurred to her. "I 'm almost sure," she said to herself, "that this is a beginning. One day he will steal up and knock at my door. Men are all alike. Perhaps it has all been planned from the very first."

An inclination to burst into wild, scornful laughter came over her but had to be resisted until the evening when she would be alone. Down-stairs she was the same as usual, but when she looked at him she thought to herself,

"If you come, I 'll throw you head first down the stairs."

In one room there was a large portrait of Fru Flaten, surrounded with crape. Flaten found himself more and more frequently standing and gazing at it, as if to bring her distinctly to his recollection; and he often sat on a sofa that stood below the picture, looking straight before him, as though taking shelter beneath it and asking the beloved dead not to leave him. The old widower was fighting in his own way.

VII

"How long am I going to stay here? Where am I going to afterward? Can I see my mother next year, and can I begin to long for a particular day, week, or month? No, I can't. The day when I look her in the face and pretend there 's nothing wrong, I shall be as bold as a street-walker. The day when I tell her the truth and expose all my lies, that day will kill her. There 's no middle course. I can never see her again."

It felt like being condemned to hard, life-long punishment. When it really forced itself upon her, it could make her drop whatever she had in her hand at the moment. What was the good of being respected here, if no one was allowed to peep into her soul? A morbid thought, which a friend could sweep away with a laugh, *she* had to hide carefully behind a smiling face; but for that very reason it stuck

fast and remained there to breed others in the darkness.

In the evenings she sat gazing down as at a chess-board, and played through the game again. "Now if, up at Mjösen, you had done this, and this. The thing is to play carefully and correctly in this world. Don't let him come into the room! Bolt the door! It will make him angry, but you will stand higher in his estimation. Some girls have kind, happy parents, a good education, and brothers that they can be proud of; and when they fall in love they get the man, and when the baby comes it 's a joy to everybody, and they don't need to sell it for money. Now, *they* have the the gift of playing properly, or God plays for them; but some make a mistake, and their whole life is lost—lost—forever lost."

And she played the game over again, and strove to play it correctly. If she had done that, and that!

The letters from her mother came like little warm breaths upon her heart; and seeing noth-

ing light in the future, she began to seek refuge in loved memories, and picture to herself her mother, the little house on the island, the sea-birds and the ocean.

It was also for her mother that she began to say her evening prayers again, and in doing so came so strangely near to her, and could as it were talk with her. Later on she began to go to church, where the innocence of the child became still more real, and once more she sat between her father and mother. The church was a small, plain one, and the congregation was composed principally of work-people from the factories. People began to grow accustomed to seeing this young woman dressed in black, who came to church every Sunday with her prayer-book in her hand, and took a seat in a secluded corner. The organ and the hymns were what she liked best, for in them her unhappiness found a wonderful relief. In the hymns it rose with a thousand harmonious voices, and in the organ tones it rolled far and wide; and she sat and sang with the others, and

as it were told everything without betraying herself.

The old priest, whose vestments were different from those worn in Norway, spoke severely about God's will. "If I were really going to reform," she thought, "I should have to surrender unconditionally. But suppose He wanted something different from what I wanted; for instance, that I should throw off my disguise and tell the whole thing to mother! Never! He must punish me, but I'll never do it."

Then came another hymn, with its large, warm comprehension, that demanded nothing, only soothed her.

Every Sunday she saw the doctor of the place walk up the aisle with an elderly woman on his arm. It could hardly be his mother; she looked like a working-woman in her Sunday clothes. But they always came together, sat beside one another, and sang from the same hymn-book.

One day at table, Regina brought these two

into the conversation. The doctor was well known as a benevolent man. Was this woman some one whom he supported?

Flaten wiped his mouth with his napkin and smiled a little strangely.

"No," he began. "She 's his own mother. It 's true she 's never been married, but she 's worked hard as a washerwoman to give the boy a good education, and now she 's reaping her reward."

"Just fancy!" said Regina, looking still more interested.

"Yes, he takes her everywhere, and says to every one, 'This is my mother.' And he makes no attempt whatever to conceal the fact that the forms are not quite in order. The poor old woman would rather keep in the background, but he pushes her forward all the more. There 's no doubt, for instance, that he only goes to church to please her and to show every one that he 's her son. It 's a sort of crotchet with him."

Regina thought of her own child and looked dreamily before her, forgetting to eat; but then she glanced at Flaten, saying to herself: "Was there some other meaning in all this? Take care! Take care! Go on eating, laugh and talk about something else!"

Before they met again, however, at supper, she had made up her mind that he had not meant anything else; and as if the thought had suddenly struck her, she said:

"But what do people say about the doctor and his mother?"

Flaten laughed. "People!" he said. "Do you think Dr. Lindström cares what people say? I once heard him say at a dinner, to the priest who was sitting beside him: 'I thank and praise my mother because she was so unlucky as to have a child, for otherwise I should not have come into existence, and goodness knows I appreciate life. Herr Pastor, we 'll drink to those women who don't get married but yet fulfil their destiny and bring a descendant into

the world.' The priest was so taken aback that he drank the toast. I saw it with my own eyes."

Regina broke into a strange laugh, and once more hastened to change the subject.

From that day she always sat so far back in church that she could have the doctor and his mother in front of her. He was a big, strong man, his hair and beard already gray, except for a little dark, curly down at the back of his red neck. His mother looked small and thin and work-worn beside him.

It sometimes happened now, too, that Regina forgot to sing because these two gave her so much to think about. She felt a real respect for this woman, not only because she had accepted the world's sentence and condemnation, but because she had brought up the boy to be what he now was. She sat there by his side as by a great work accomplished.

"And I?" she thought. "What have I done? I could n't have done otherwise. But she? She did n't sell her child and buy fine clothes

for herself with the money. But I? Well, I could n't do otherwise. But what would she say about me if she knew? She would say: 'What have you done? That dress, that hat, those gloves—where did you get the money for them?' "

Fresh musings now began to weave their sinister net behind her contented face. One day she went to Herr Flaten and asked for an advance, made up the full amount, and sent it to the professor with a request that he would forward it to the people concerned; but still the hateful act had been committed and was like a stain upon her life which seemed as if it could never be washed off.

She began to shun the church. She could not bear any longer to sit looking at those two.

She had no girl friends, no diversions, to bring fresh air into her mind. Day after day there was the same work, in the same rooms, the same mask to the world, and the same hidden trouble.

Where was the child now? Was it so cer-

tain that he was happy? Suppose she had had the same courage as that woman! But then she laughed. It seemed so utterly impossible. America? Yes, that would have been another matter.

The rocking-chair rocked far on into the evening now, as she sat gazing westward at the blue hills, as if gazing might be of some use; and as she gazed, this child that she had wronged so deeply seemed to become so strangely living, and she pondered much as to where it could be now.

Hitherto the future had seemed to her hopelessly dark, but now a little spark began to glow, and she continued to gaze at it; and the little spark grew brighter and brighter, and fair dreams gathered round it as it shone out clearer and clearer.

VIII

Autumn had come with warm, still days. The apple- and pear-trees were laden with red and yellow fruit, and their leaves were reddening in the sunshine. As Regina wandered along the sand-strewn paths of the garden, she would often stand and look down the sloping lines of fir-clad hills on which the morning mist rose and fell, and where yellow patches of fading leafage embroidered the long ridges of fir and pine. The sky was so bright and clear that each fir-top, though miles away, stood out distinctly against it. Far down in the south, the hills sank into the plain, which merged in the distant horizon where the ocean lay.

Then came days of wind and rain, and when she ran across the wide courtyard the wind would come flying over her head with shavings from the factories.

When evening came and the blinds were

drawn down and the lamps lighted, a great emptiness seemed to pervade the large rooms, in which there were only two people to give them life.

Regina used to sit with her work in the dining-room all the evening, while Flaten sat in the little boudoir. But one evening he came out to her and said:

"Now, my dear Fröken Aas, it 's uncomfortable enough here without our making it seem emptier than it really is. Won't you come and sit with me, and then neither of us will be alone."

She silently rose and went with him. In the comfortable little room, where work-box, cushions, writing-materials, and photographs all recalled his dead wife, he had lighted the fire, and the flames gave out a pleasant warmth.

It was unavoidable that, as they sat here together through the autumn evenings, she bending over her needlework, and he with his book, they should begin to be more intimate,

more especially as they were compatriots in a foreign land.

He told her about his youth spent at Hamar and his experiences in foreign towns.

She expected that he would begin to question her more closely. If he were discreet, it would at once arouse her suspicion; but if he questioned her, she must needs have recourse to falsehood again.

But he asked no questions. Perhaps he knew everything. And what then?

She must have been sent here on purpose, to be hidden away so that she and her child should never find each other. They thought she would soon forget it amid new surroundings, perhaps fall in love and marry, if she were one of those shallow natures that can forget anything. Would they be right? They had pityingly put money into her hand, as they would pay a street-walker, saying: "Take this! The child is ours now. You must disappear and never show yourself again!" So deep had she sunk! And she submitted to it. She ate, slept,

laughed; oh dear, yes, she put up with it all! They were not mistaken; she was as bad as that. She let them use her; she had no pride.

Flaten appeared to be reading but often glanced at her as she sat beside the fire bending over her work, so young, so serious, so beautiful. Her dark hair was combed simply down on both sides, hiding her ears, and was gathered in a knot low down at the back of her head. Her forehead was very white. Her long, drooping eyelashes added mystery to her glance; her lips were firmly closed. She ordinarily wore a dark dress of a woolen material and a blouse without any ornament, not even a brooch or the sign of a watch-chain.

"What are you thinking about, Fröken Aas?" he said, looking up from his book with a smile.

She awoke with a start, but immediately found the right expression and smiled.

"I?" she said. "Oh, nothing in particular." He returned to his book, while she went on with her sewing.

So he watched her, did he? Perhaps he was amused at her acting the part of a young, innocent girl, and pretending nothing was wrong; and if he really knew that she had given her child away to strangers in return for money, must he not despise her? Would it be strange if he came and knocked at her door one evening?

The sewing went on intermittently. Flaten glanced up again and saw only her hands in the ruddy light of the fire. They were young, smooth hands and bore no ring. Had they ever had one? There were a thousand things about which he would have liked to ask, but he kept on putting off the attempt through an inexplicable fear of being disappointed.

Suddenly she rose and said, "Good night," although it was unusually early; and he noticed her agitation. What could it be that she sat and pondered over?

"Good night, Fröken Aas! I hope you 'll sleep well."

He sat listening to her footsteps as they

passed through the rooms and died away on the stairs; and the flames in the fireplace sank lower and lower, because he forgot to put on more wood.

Regina sat upon the edge of her bed, gazing at the little lamp that stood on the table beside her. These musings as to where her child could be used to come upon her like a sudden indisposition. This evening it had struck her that the father of the child was at the back of everything. Could it have been he who, through the professor, had placed it with trustworthy people, and out of pity had given her that money? One ought to treat such a girl decently, ought one not? And he would look after the child, but he did not consider her worthy to bring it up. He shut her out; he sent her out of the country. Could that be it? She could bear indignities, but no more from him, not for the world any more from him! She must find out about this. She must know at once.

But the very next day fresh conjectures

presented themselves. They were all equally probable, because she knew nothing except that the child was somewhere in the world. She could see the child with her aunt in Nordland, and wondered how the story could have come there. She could see it with the aunt in the Mjösen district, and this possibility filled her with rage. She thought of one of Flaten's sisters, who she knew was childless, and who really did live at Christiansand. The more she went over the various possibilities, the more alive did the child appear in her imagination, and the more impatient she was to find out something about it. Would she never find it again? How could she know whether it was happy?

And yet she went about here and let the time pass, ate, slept, became rosy and fat, as if she had no disgrace to bear. She might be vexed, might grieve, and shed tears; but could she do anything? No! And she loaded herself with reproaches day after day and night after night, until one day she sat down and wrote to the

professor. She would begin carefully. All she asked was to be allowed to know how her child was.

She waited anxiously for days and weeks, but the professor was silent. "So they think it 's only a fancy," she said to herself. "They 've treated me like an animal whose young they take away, and imagine I should forget in a few days. Well, well, perhaps they 're right; perhaps I *am* as bad as that." And she smiled grimly, while the rocking-chair stood still.

After taking this first step, however, it was impossible not to take another. And yet—where was she to go? All roads led through the professor. And supposing he refused to disclose the child's whereabouts, then the game they had played against her would be won, and she would never be able to atone for the wrong she had done. Supposing she went to the professor, and begged and threatened, and he was inflexible, what then?

"What is it you have done?"

She stopped the rocking-chair and put her hands to her head. She felt that some day she might lose her reason.

They were strange days that followed. She was tormented with anxiety and went from one plan to another. She grew more and more enraged with those who had taken her child from her by artifice, while the wrong she had done it felt heavier and heavier, and her cowardice more and more shameful. Her thoughts gave her no rest, and her longing for the child grew more and more intense. But what was she to do?

In the midst of this state of indecision, a feeling of happiness began to stir within her; she felt stronger and had a new pleasure in life. The future now held something enticing. A new day was not a thing to be dreaded; it might bring a gift. But why was she still here, where the earth was hot beneath her feet? She was like one imprisoned for life, who sud-

denly discovers a means of flight and liberty, and yet hesitates. Why? Because it requires a leap, a foolhardy leap into darkness.

When she began to seek her child, it could hardly be hidden any longer. The way to her mother would be absolutely barred forever, and to the rest of her relations—aunts, cousins —a husband, the respect of others. A multitude of tender roots must be torn up, and all her struggles to keep it hidden would have been in vain.

The choice must be made at once. The child began to call from one direction, a number of voices from another. On the one side she was threatened with shame before the world, on the other with shame to herself. The nights seemed endless. She longed to escape from this net of falsehood and make-believe. Perhaps she would be able to weep it all out over her child.

The days passed, and winter had come.

IX

One day after Christmas, Regina returned from a walk with shivering fits and a headache. She had to go to bed at once, and later in the day she was in a high fever.

As she lay in her room, she was once more oppressed by the feeling of being alone. Suppose her illness should be fatal. Her mother could not come. And if she died, how would it be with her child? She lay here among strangers, and it was her own fault.

She began to cry, while her teeth chattered with the cold, and a sharp pain moved from place to place in her chest.

One of the maids came up to sit with her, the pale, gray-haired Norwegian woman, who had been with Herr Flaten ever since his marriage. Regina asked her if the doctor were coming. "We 've sent for him," she answered, "but he cannot come before the evening."

It was a long time to wait. The room grew dark. Napoleon before Moscow turned into an ugly bird. The ceiling began to go up and down, and it made her giddy; and then she began to sink down, down, into a fiery darkness.

She awoke to find the lamp lighted and Dr. Lindström standing by her bedside. He spoke in pleasant, low tones. Her head was confused, and for some time she was under the impression that this was her own son. Had they not been to church together last Sunday, and was he not always beside her and honoring her?

He took her temperature and then wanted to examine her chest; but at this she awoke to reality and was alarmed. "He will see," she thought, "that I 've had a child!" And she held her night-dress closed with both hands in a convulsive clasp. He only laughed, however, and, removing her hands, unfastened it. She had to sit up in bed. When he was finished he told her she must stay warmly covered up in

bed; and when he had left her, she heard him telling Flaten, who was waiting below, that she had inflammation of the lungs.

She thought nothing of that; her one thought, recurring again and again, was: "Did he notice? Will he tell?"

A smaller lamp was lighted and a newspaper set up in front of it so that the light should not hurt the patient's eyes.

During the night Flaten wandered aimlessly about the rooms down-stairs in his dressing-gown. His face was gray. He had thought of late that this was something that could be overcome; but now, when perhaps she would die—now?

Now and then he stopped in front of the large portrait surrounded with crape, but seemed afraid to look at it, and, turning away, fled into another room. Then he went up-stairs and listened outside the door of the sick-room, but would not go in; and once more he descended the stairs in his noiseless felt slippers, with the candle in his hand, while the

winter winds whistled and howled outside in the darkness.

He next sent up a half-dressed maid to ask how the patient was, and she was scarcely in bed before he rang again, and she had to go up once more.

"How is she now?"

"She 's still delirious."

And he wandered in and out again among the empty rooms with the candle in his hand.

The next day he did not go to his office, and when Dr. Lindström came down from his morning visit to the patient Flaten's voice trembled as he looked at the doctor and said, "Well?"

The doctor hoped that being young and strong she would pull through.

For the greater part of two days Regina lay unconscious. The old servant often sat beside her, looking at the young, deathly face with the white brow, and wondering what would be the end. One night as she sat there,

Regina opened her eyes and looked wildly at her. "Anna!" she said in an unnaturally loud voice. "You must write a letter."

"A letter? Yes, certainly I will. Is it to your mother?"

Regina's bosom heaved, but her eyes were still fixed on the maid:

"Mother?" she repeated. "No, she 's dead. You must write to—— I must tell you something that you and no one else shall know. You see—I—I 've had——" But as if she had no strength for more, she once more sank into a state of relaxed, heavy drowsiness with her eyes closed.

What had she meant? The old servant sat wondering. In the middle of the night Regina suddenly began to sob. "Let me have it!" she cried, stretching out her arms. "Let me have it back!"

"Hush, hush!" said the maid. "What is it you want?"

"Don't you see him sitting up there with it

on his knee? He won't let me have it back. I 've killed it! There 's no hope for me now. I 'm lost!"

The old servant compressed her lips and began to tuck the clothes in carefully about the patient.

Regina kept her bed for a month, and when she began to recover and to sit up for a little among her pillows, February had come and the sun shone for several hours into her room. She was cared for like a princess and had all kinds of good things and strengthening wines. Her slightest wish set the whole house in motion. Flaten still remained invisible, but she felt his presence like a good spirit in the house, always thinking of her.

When she began to sit up she felt as if she had received the gift of a new life and was full of joy and gratitude. She would now, as a matter of course, use the new life to make old wrongs right. That was what it had been given her for, and as soon as she was well

enough—yes, what then? It was a bright mist to gaze into.

One day she had a mirror brought her and found that she had lost her good looks. "Oh, well!" she thought. "What do I want with beauty now?"

During this time all her thoughts of the future gathered round her child. When the sun rose upon her, the child came with it. All her plans found their way naturally to it, just as a plant in the corner of a room grows toward the window. As she gradually came back to life, she grew toward the only thing that was dear to her, with a warm, bright longing, as though it were her own heart she was to get back. More courage comes to one who has been at death's door. The difficulties now seemed small. Relatives, the judgment of others, thoughts of a husband—these were roots that no longer needed pulling up; they withered away of themselves in the shadow of the one thing.

While she was thus being tended and without occupation, her ideas became more and more bound up with the child. She dressed and undressed it; she made its clothes; she looked down into its eyes, felt its smooth, soft face against her breast, noticed the smell peculiar to babies—all recollections from the lying-in hospital which now awoke. Sometimes when people came in, she was astonished that they had not brought the child and said: "We 've found it! Here it is!" And the February sun shone bright and kind through the frost tracery on the windows, and spring was coming; and she sat there, happy and with joy in her eyes, looking at the sunbeams as at a bright resolution.

When she once more went about her usual occupations down-stairs, the child was always with her. It would soon be a year old now. It laughed; it had two or three little teeth, perhaps it could say "Mama"—to some one else. It was washed by strange hands, it was sung to sleep—— No! she could not bear it!

Everything she touched reminded her of it—the patterns on the earthenware, the flowers in the rooms, the ornaments that might be toys; she only needed to take up a needle and thread, to see its little drawers that wanted mending.

She wrote to the professor again, this time asking to be told where her child was. Her plan was ready. She would go to America with her little boy and hide herself away and work, at washing or sewing, it did not matter what as long as she could keep herself and her child.

Weeks passed, but there was no word from the professor.

One day she was surprised to find a letter beside her plate on the breakfast-table. Flaten had gone to Gothenburg, but this was his writing. An uneasy suspicion made her hands tremble as she opened it. Yes, she was right! It was an offer of marriage.

She sat for a moment looking at it. She was woman enough to feel flattered. She might own all this and take a high social position!

He was good and kind, but could she confess to him? Or should she play the hypocrite to him all her life? She shook her head. The whole thing was impossible.

After this, however, she could not remain in the house. Where was she to go? She would have to make up her mind now. She had saved a few hundred *kroner;* perhaps that would be enough to take her across the Atlantic.

When Flaten came home he was pale and glanced anxiously at her. Little was said by either of them at dinner, and when it was over they went their several ways.

In the evening she went to his private office, where he was sitting writing. He rose expectantly, understanding that this was the decision; but he tried to smile as he offered her a chair. She remained standing, however.

"I must go back to Norway as soon as possible," she began, trying to look him calmly in the face.

He sank heavily into a chair by the writing-

table and leaned his head on his hand. In a little while he looked up.

"Are you going for—for good?"

"Yes, and probably to America."

She no longer troubled to guess from his face whether he knew all about her. He was a stranger to her, and she was now going to disappear.

"Then I shall be left alone here," he said, taking up a pen and beginning to scribble on the blotting-paper. "Well, well!" He rose, and held out his hand with a melancholy smile. "Forgive me, then! But will you remember that if you should ever be in any difficulty, you will make me happy by coming to me with it."

She thanked him with emotion, but she felt as if she had no room for sympathy. Now that the step was taken, she was all impatience to be gone.

X

In the dawn of a March day the train was hastening westward, past trees and houses, bearing Regina toward Norway. At one moment she thought it went too slowly, but at the next she felt inclined to jump out and go back. What would be the end of this? What was the fate she was now on her way to meet? Would it not do to turn back?

She seemed to be going farther and farther away from a shore on which she had left all her past life. Her mother stood there, too, and her other relatives, people's respect, and the dream of a husband; but she was going away from it, giving it all up, and drifting toward a new shore where the little child was waiting. But suppose she did not find this child. In that case she would have taken the foolhardy leap into the darkness in vain, she would continue to be a homeless wanderer; and now she

could not retrace her steps. She felt sick with suspense.

When she arrived at the station in Christiania, she left her luggage in the cloak-room, and, without giving herself any time to find a lodging, she took a cab to the lying-in hospital. It was the doctor, however, who came to her in the low, dark office, the professor had been ill for some time. Regina obtained the latter's private address and started off again in another cab.

It drove out along the Drammen Road, up into a villa suburb. Regina was so excited that when the driver had to stop now and again to let a tram-car pass, she scolded him for doing so. At length she found herself on the second floor of a large stone building and rang the bell. The door was opened by a maid, who stood drying her hands on her apron as she told her that no one could see the professor—he was seriously ill.

"Let me speak just one word to him!" begged Regina. The maid looked her up and

down, and as her hair and dress were disordered after her journey, she decided that this was no lady and was about to shut the door again. But Regina stood in the way. "I must speak to him!" she said imperiously. "Go and fetch your mistress!"

"What! Do you mean to force your way in? Get out of the way so that I can shut the door!" The girl was angry.

"Go and fetch your mistress!"

At last she managed to bring the girl to reason, and immediately after an elderly, white-haired lady, with a large shawl over her shoulders, came out into the hall and in an almost tearful voice asked what Regina wanted.

With an imploring look Regina said: "I'm so sorry, but I must speak to the professor. Just one word! It 's about something of the greatest importance."

"Why, I 'm not even allowed to speak to him myself, and *you* want to! Who are you?"

Regina passed her hand over her eyes.

"He does n't know my name, but be so good as to ask him—at once—ask him who took my child! It was a year ago."

It was the first time she had told her secret since she had left the hospital. The lady looked at her a little, and then said in the same complaining tone: "Well, I 'll ask him as soon as the doctor gives me permission. Come again to-morrow."

Regina went slowly down the stairs. There was nothing for it but to wait until to-morrow. But what if the professor died to-night?

The streets were noisy and crowded with people and yet Regina thought she was walking through a desert waste. What had she to do with these people, and they with her? There was only one being in the world for whom she cared now, and supposing—supposing she did not find it!

The night was long. The next day she rang once more at the professor's door. The maid came and told her in a whisper that the professor was dying. Once more Regina

strove until she succeeded in having his wife called out; but when she came and saw who it was, she turned to go back, saying plaintively: "Is that you again? Can't you see that we 've other things to think about now?"

Regina turned faint. She seized the lady by the arm and, without knowing what she did, sank upon her knees. The lady started back. Was the woman mad?

"Oh, madam!" she cried. "Listen for one moment! It 's about my child. No one but the professor knows where it is. Do, for God's sake, ask him! I 've come here from Sweden, and I want to take my child to America. I parted with it of my own free will, but now I regret it and must find the child again. Ask him before he dies, or I shall go mad! I shall throw myself into the river; I am lost! Oh, help me!" And she began to sob.

The lady saw Regina's despair, and stooping down she patted her on the cheek and said: "There, there, child! I 'll ask him if only God will grant him consciousness so long."

"Will you promise? You 'll promise, then? Ask him at once!" Regina was beside herself and gazed wildly at the professor's wife.

"Yes, yes, I 've said so! But don't keep me now. I must go back. Come again to-morrow."

It was a definite promise, and in her excited state Regina felt encouraged and full of hope. To-morrow she would know all about it.

Once more she wandered aimlessly about the streets. Her head was confused with the emotion and suspense of the night, and she had eaten nothing since—she did not know when. It was only ten o'clock, so she would have to wait twenty-three hours before she could dare to ring at the professor's door again. And in the meantime?

She must find something to make the time go, so she went to make inquiries about the steamer to America, and then had her trunk brought up to the hotel, as it would have to be repacked for the long journey. As she was beginning to do this, however, a superstitious

fancy made her desist. "If I get everything ready," she thought, "I shall be unsuccessful."

In the dusk she walked up toward St. Hans Hill and looked in at the windows where the lamps were being lighted and faces were visible for a moment before the blinds were drawn down. "Who knows?" she thought. "Perhaps my little boy is in there—or there—or there, and is being put to bed now. But tomorrow evening! Shall I have him then?"

Up on the hill she sat down on a seat, for, worn out with sleepless nights and excitement, she felt an aching pain in her back. But then she began to feel cold. She had walked about so long in the wet snow that her feet were wet. Soon the last promenader disappeared, and below her the town sank into a gray darkness out of which rose factory chimneys and church spires; and the street-lamps were lighted, while here and there in the sky yellow stars began to twinkle, and the steamers in the fjord sounded their steam-whistles.

The figure on the seat among the trees be-

came less and less discernible in the darkness. She was not asleep, nor yet was she sufficiently awake to notice how cold she was. The minutes were passing, one by one, with such torturing slowness to one who waits.

When at last she lay shivering between the cold sheets in the hotel, she seemed to awake, and the oppressive feeling of being alone made her heart contract. All round her was the great, desolate world, and she stood quite alone in the very middle of it. She might be cold in here, and she might reach a warm little home. To-morrow — to-morrow? Involuntarily she folded her hands and began to pray, sobbing while she prayed. Her faith grew firmer, and at last she lay rejoicing. She felt as if she had climbed up to sunny peaks and received promises from God himself. When she closed her eyes there came to her the fancies she had had as a child when she said her prayers at night. She saw the starry sky all round her, and she hovered in space. Every word in her prayer was a little white dove that she sent up

to God. Now she doubted no longer, and if she doubted it would be sin. Had not Christ raised the widow's son from the dead. Her child was alive; she only asked that she might have him again, and "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." And at last she fell asleep, full of a happy certainty that God heard her prayers.

At nine the next morning she hurried off. She had been too restless to take even a cup of coffee; that she would have afterward. When she reached the professor's house, she was surprised to see several carriages standing outside it and a number of people going in. Finding the door open, she followed some others through the hall and into a large room, in which were several people. What was this? A strange chill seemed to make her rigid, and she could not think. Now she saw the white-haired lady sitting sobbing in a chair, with several people bending over her. There was a bed, too, and there lay the professor, so she was still in time. She darted up to the bed,

and grasped the hand of the sick man. It was cold.

People looked at her in astonishment, but the next moment she was standing with a pale face in front of the professor's wife. "Did you find out who has my child?" she asked.

Every one stared at her, and a hand was laid upon her shoulder. The professor's wife raised her tear-stained face and looked at her in consternation, for there was madness in Regina's eyes; but she made an impatient movement and answered, "No, no, I did not find out anything; I did n't even say good-by!"

The hand now pressed more heavily on Regina's shoulder, and she felt herself being led out.

XI

Toward midnight a policeman standing near the West Station observed a figure walking up and down the quay. Now and then it stopped and looked across the black water, on which rocked a few shafts of light. It must be a woman, and it looked as if she were waiting until the lights were extinguished at twelve o'clock.

All at once he lost sight of her and hurried on to the quay and began to look about in the water; but in a little while he caught sight of her again, sitting on the pavement at the foot of a telephone pole.

Considering that the moment had arrived for him to speak to her, he went up to her and asked her if she was ill.

She raised her head, and the dim light from a gas-lamp fell upon her face. "Ill?" she said. "No, I 'm not ill."

"Are you waiting for any one?"

"May n't I sit here? I 'm not in any one's way."

"Where do you live?"

"May n't I sit quietly here?"

"Yes, but let me tell you that it 's midnight."

"I know it is."

The policeman walked on a few steps and stopped again. In a little while she had forgotten him. She was gazing at the water with dull eyes. "No," she said to herself. "There 's no mercy for you, so you need n't pray, for God won't listen to you. There 's pardon for those who kill their children, but not for those who sell them and take money for them. You can throw yourself into the sea, but that won't settle your account. The only salvation would be to find it, and now that 's impossible."

She rose and began to walk up and down again, reeling like a drunken man. She felt it was impossible to return to the town, where everybody was made of ice. It was just as impossible to escape altogether. There are

moments when life casts us out into darkness, and then even death refuses to open to us.

She heard the heavy tread of iron-studded boots behind her. It was the policeman, and as he came up to her he said he was going to get her a cab. He went off, and in a few minutes a cab drove up in front of her; everything seemed to happen in a mist. She got into the cab, named her hotel, and allowed herself to be driven away.

On the way to the hotel, however, a thought struck her. Folden! Dr. Folden! He lived here, and of course it was he after all who was at the back of all this. He had the child hidden; he knew where it was. He would not let his child suffer want, so he had taken care of it. And in reality he had meant to care for her, too, for he had got her a place. People are better than one thinks.

The carriage swayed, and the wheels rumbled over the paving-stones. Now they were crossing Carl Johan Street, which was

almost deserted in the half-darkness. Suddenly she cried to the driver, "Do you know where Dr. Folden lives?"

The driver pulled up and looked down at her.

"Eh?" he said.

"Dr. Folden! Do you know where Dr. Folden lives?"

The man drew out a pocketbook and consulted it by the light from a lamp-post. He found the address, and Regina asked him to drive there. They turned up University Street and soon came to a halt outside a door. Regina paid the man, and he drove off.

She looked about her and found Dr. Folden's plate at the entrance. He had his own bell, and before she quite knew what she was doing she had rung it.

She waited a long time and at last sat down on a stone step close by. Now and then she heard the rumble of a carriage driving through the town. A clock struck one. The noise in the large town was dying away.

She was too weary to think. She had a feeling that she had now reached the utmost limits of that which is ordinarily done. She swallowed all pride in coming to this man, but what use would she have for pride hereafter?

At last a window was opened in the second story, and a servant put her head out and asked what she wanted.

"I want to speak to Dr. Folden," Regina answered.

The window was closed; and a few minutes later the gate was opened, and she followed the maid up the dark stairs, the maid carrying a light. It was only natural to suppose that the visit had to do with some case of illness, and a young doctor cannot afford to refuse to see any one at night.

On the stairs Regina slackened her pace. Her heart began to beat fast. "What have I done?" she thought. "In the middle of the night! Won't he think me mad?"

"Come in, please," said the girl, as she opened the front door, and led Regina into a

waiting-room, and then, after lighting a lamp, left the room.

There was perfect silence in the house and no noise outside. A clock ticked on the wall. The lamp began to smoke, as it had no oil, and the only things that were discernible in the dim light were the curtains and the white-painted door. Some minutes passed, during which Regina sat huddled together on her chair.

At last she heard steps approaching; the door opened, and Dr. Folden came in. He had not changed except that he now wore a pointed beard instead of a mustache. He had hastily tied a silk handkerchief round his neck in place of a collar. He said, "Good evening!" and stopped in the middle of the room, saying: "Shall we go? Is it something serious?"

"Good evening!" said Regina, rising. He thought he recognized the voice and came nearer, but then stood still as if turned to stone. Regina, too, was at a loss what to say, so they stood gazing at one another in silence. At

last he passed his hand across his eyes, as though to make sure that he was not dreaming, and whispered: "What—what is—— Haven't you made a mistake, or have you come to fetch a doctor?"

His pitiable appearance woke her up, and for a moment she felt inclined to laugh. Then she felt her own superiority in the situation, and looking at him, said:

"Excuse my troubling you to-night, Dr. Folden, but I want to know where my child is. Have you taken care of it? Where have you put it? If I don't find out instantly, I can't say what might n't happen!"

He had moved toward the window, but now hastened to shut the door into the adjoining room and draw the curtain before it, and then turned to her with a blank look on his face.

"Your child?" he whispered. "Have you a —a child? Are you married?"

Regina burst into a peal of wild laughter, which rang strangely through the silent house. Folden involuntarily went up to her.

"Excuse me!" he said. "But people are asleep. You must explain this to me, though. Why should you imagine that I—your child?" He suddenly passed his hand across his forehead, as if something were beginning to dawn upon him.

"Good night, Dr. Folden!" said Regina calmly. "I see now that I 've made a mistake. Good night!" And she moved toward the door.

But Dr. Folden held her back.

"Tell me what this means!" he said. "You 're so pale, Regina. You 've changed; you have been unhappy? I 've never heard anything about you. Can I help you at all?"

"No," said Regina, freeing herself from his grasp. "I 've not been at all unhappy, and you can't help me in any way. Good night! I made a mistake."

He offered to see her home, but she persistently refused to let him, although he had to go down the stairs with her to open the street door. As he stood looking after her as

she went down the street, he said to himself: "She must be mad. It 's to be hoped I sha'n't have any trouble with her now!" He was thinking of his wife.

In Carl Johan Street Regina met a drunken man who spoke to her. She set off at a run, but he followed her. At last she caught sight of a policeman and, running up to him, asked him to see her home.

XII

It was dark in the little hotel bedroom where Regina lay, only a faint glimmer finding its way in from a gas-lamp outside. Regina lay fully dressed upon the bed, having divested herself only of her shoes; her hands were clasped at the back of her head, and her eyes were half closed.

There are sufferings in which tears relieve the heart, and there are others which make the sufferer pale and dumb; but there are some which seem to leave one on a drifting ice-floe, looking in vain for land, for a boat, for rescue. A man thus left does not lament and sigh, nor are there tears in his eyes. At first, it is true, he seems paralyzed, but after a little he begins to dig with his nails in the ice until he detaches a piece, and with that he sets to work to row. He may have been a poor wretch before, but he is a giant now. He does not fight

for his life; he only rises to wrestle with the impossible.

After having lain motionless for several hours, Regina sat up and passed her hand over her eyes. "I do declare you 're crying!" she said half to herself. "As if you had n't howled enough already, and as if it were of any use, either!" And she laughed a short bitter laugh and once more lay down with her hands behind her head.

She had just been standing, as it were, at the half-open door, where she could peep in at her child; and now the door had been slammed in her face, and she thrown out into the dark. Whichever way she turned it was equally hopeless. The child might be in this town, in the country, in another town, in the north, in the west, in the east, in the south, in this country, or in some other country; it was impossible to know. There was no one to give her a hint now that the professor was dead. She had gone to the hospital to ask, but all in vain. And Dr. Folden! How could she ever for a

single moment have dreamt of anything so honorable from such a man!

"You must give it up!" she said to herself. "There 's a conspiracy against you, either of men or of something higher; but whichever it is, it 's evil. Can a loving God want to drag you from one misery into another? No, no! The evil one has the power in his hands; he will use you as his victim, and you will let yourself be used. You 'll give it up now; you won't offer everlasting resistance, will you?"

Something seemed to chill her very blood, and she rose from the bed and stood looking out of the window, with her hands behind her, the street-lamp throwing a pale light upon her face.

"Turn back and begin to live the ordinary life now? And give up searching? Impossible! Perhaps there is no way out, but I must make one. Can I? When the whole world and perhaps God and His angels are against me? Can I perhaps even then?"

She shivered and clenched her hands. "From

this day forth," she said to herself, "you shed no more tears, pray no more prayers, for it is only deceiving yourself. You must laugh but be as cold as ice, and then you won't be disappointed. Believe that every one is your enemy, and then, too, you won't be disappointed. And then begin, then begin. Can you rise in defiance against it all?

"I shall only now have the power to hold out, now when life and death are n't of much account, nor the respect of others, and such nonsense; nor one's conscience, either, for it 's only a liar and deceiver. Has it ever done me anything but harm? And God? He may take my life, and He may throw me into hell, but I shall accuse Him and say, 'You gave me a joyless life, and now you may give me an eternity of torment.' " She clenched her hands more tightly. "After this I won't hope for anything, won't believe anything, won't love anything; but I will, I will, I will find my child! It *shall* be! I will revenge myself upon those who have ill-treated me."

The longer she stood, the harder and colder did her mood become; but she began to feel that she was tired and faint. "I 've neither eaten nor slept for a long time," she thought, passing her hand across her forehead. "The first thing I 've got to do is to get strong."

She lighted a candle, and remembered some sandwiches she had put into her bag in Sweden and had not touched. These she took out and began to eat. The bread had become dry, but she forced it down and drank some water. It was now four o'clock, and all was silence.

She undressed and went to bed, saying once more to herself: "There 's no time now for useless pondering and tears. I must sleep if I don't want to go mad."

Once more she forced herself to fix her mind upon some trivial thing; and, worn out as she was, she sank into a weary unconsciousness, in which she continually heard the earnest voice saying: "Sleep! Sleep!"

When she awoke the sun was shining into her room and it was eleven o'clock. She still

felt pleasantly sleepy, and slept again for two more hours. When she next awoke, she rang for coffee, and, after drinking it, lay still, thinking. She must now come to some determination. It was a relief to feel that she was alone in the world and that there was no one whose leave she had to ask. She might make the most foolish plans, and no one could interfere.

No, it was impossible to turn back; it would be to condemn herself to everlasting torture; it would be to kill all dreams for the future; it would be to own her enemies in the right. She could not do it.

The thing was now to make plans and not make any mistake; and as she lay weighing and rejecting, she felt as if she were groping her way in the dark, where it would be fatal to stumble.

She saw a bright spot in the distance, and she would make for that. It would perhaps take time, circuitous ways, disappointments, wrong-doing; but she was determined to reach

it. There were so many ways of setting about it. Begging was one. You go to people's doors, arouse pity, stretch out a hand, receive alms, grovel in the dust, and make a fool of yourself. As she had done to Folden no longer ago than last night! Should she go on with that? No! By the living God, no! She had had enough of humiliations.

There are other ways. To outwit? To compel?

For both of these money was required, and she had none. She must be prepared to travel, perhaps far and for a long time, and this required money. And to threaten? In that case she would first have to find the right person, and then prove that she herself was the right one. But she did not even know the child's name, and if she found the people they might deny it and make up some story, for the professor was well out of the way.

No, the thing to do was to proceed with cunning, to smile and come upon them unawares. Was it a member of her family? She would

have to take them unawares, too, before they had time to prepare. But if it were necessary for her to travel far and long, to follow up a clue and follow it for weeks and months, she must have money. She might have to buy a few people, and money she had none. She was alone in a hotel with two or three hundred *kroner*. If she were to begin with that, she would run the risk of one day finding herself penniless, and then ill, and then new humiliations. No, thank you!

She lay turning over in her mind all kinds of wild plans for procuring money, until the thought of Herr Flaten suddenly flashed across her. He said he would help her in a difficulty. But she needed a great deal of money, and to have to ask him, to explain, to accept fresh humiliating assistance—— No, thank you!

But what if Flaten knew her secret? What if it were his sister?

In that case he would not have proposed to her.

Well, was that quite certain? When she really thought things over, had he not made suspicious remarks on such and such occasions?

She lay gazing at this possibility as at a dim little light in limitless darkness. Perhaps it was no light, but there was nothing else to be seen.

Should she give up the whole thing and let the others be victorious? Was it likely!

He was rich, at any rate, and that was a way by which she could also become rich and powerful, and it was wonderful how much she could see behind that.

An hour passed, during which she turned restlessly in her bed, trying to find other expedients, from a feeling that there was something wrong about this one; but she could see none. She might end everything by throwing herself into the sea, but that would be still more cowardly. And then suppose Flaten knew all about it, and she would not even take the trouble to try!

The tiny light was perhaps no light, but

there was nothing else to be seen; and she lay gazing at it so long that at last it appeared to her to be dazzlingly bright.

She rose and dressed, and just as a man clinging to an upturned boat requires little time for action, so Regina lost no time in sitting down and writing to Herr Flaten that she was sorry she had left him, and, remembering all his kindness to her, asked to be allowed to come back.

Suddenly she laid down her pen and leaned her head upon her hands. "Good heavens!" she thought. "Is there really no other way?"

"Oh, yes!" said a mocking voice. "You can throw yourself into the sea."

In a little while she went on writing, but again came to a standstill. "What has this man done to me that I should use him like this?" she thought, getting up and walking up and down the room. "No, he has done nothing, but have n't others made use of *me,* and what had I done? First Folden. He made

use of me to make his summer pleasant. He must have known at the same time he broke a heart and made a life desolate; but he made use of me all the same, and God lets him lead a happy life.

"Then they made use of me at the hospital; they used me for the purpose of learning, although I nearly died of shame. And those strangers and the professor, who stole my child from me—they used me. And even God! I have begged Him, but I suppose He, too, thinks that girl 's of no consequence. Let her cry! It does n't matter. There 's a married couple that want a child. Use that girl! She 'll perhaps never be happy again, but use her all the same. That girl 's not of much consequence."

Once more she sat down and, with lips tightly compressed, went on writing; but a sudden thought made her start up. "You did it of your own free will. You yourself determined to give the child to those people."

She walked up and down, working herself up into a rage, and seeking proofs that this was not the case.

"I was really not free. One's evil fate always waits for the moment when we 're weak and powerless, and then falls upon us and forces us to give up the dearest possession we have. And when we regret it and want to have it back, what then? Then it is like a pawnbroker to whom we 've taken, in our necessity, our most valued jewel. He turns round and says: 'You did it of your free will. It was an honorable transaction!' Oh!"

She sat down and finished her letter; and when it was done she breathed more freely. Later on, as she wandered aimlessly about the streets, she glanced at the passers-by with the thought: "Don't look at me like that! I 'm no worse than you are."

So now she was on the way toward the point of light where her happiness awaited her. She could not turn back now.

How long would this married life last? How

long would she be obliged to suffer, bear, commit crimes and palliate them, act a part and simulate love—how long? When would she be able to sit down with her child folded to her heart, and wash away her uncleanness with her tears? She could not think about it now; she would rather rejoice over the step she had taken. When one is toiling up a mountain, it does not do to think of the higher one that lies beyond.

In the twilight she came to a church of which the doors stood open, and where a few people were going in. Without thinking much about it, she went in, too, to pass the time. The church was brightly lighted, and the tones of the organ sounded through it. It was only now that she recollected it was Sunday and that this was the evening service. She sat down, but in a little while a stifling feeling came over her, and she felt as if she herself, in this brightly lighted church with the people and the organ, were an evil spirit that had suddenly appeared in a holy place; and when

the priest went up into the pulpit, she stole softly out.

On the steps she sat down and hid her face in her hands. The voice of the preacher sounded faintly like a buzzing. She had a feeling as if good spirits were stretching out their hands to save her. They promised to show her the way to her child, if only she would throw herself into their arms.

But that would be a new revolution, and she was not equal to that now. No, she was not equal to that now.

BOOK TWO

I

THERE had been a large party at the Flatens', and in the cold winter night the valley was filled with the sound of clear sleigh-bells, as sleigh after sleigh flew along the broad roads until their lights were at last lost down in the darkness. Above among the dark pines stood the big house, with its windows on both floors still glowing with wandering lamps. Then they began to go out, first window after window in the first floor, and then in the reception-rooms below, until at last there was only one illuminated window in the whole of the front of the house.

Herr Flaten had gone the round of the house and now came into the bedroom with the tassels of his dressing-gown girdle dancing in front of him. He was a little pale and tired after the dancing and the wine. His hair had become white. He stopped in the middle of

the room and looked for a moment at Regina, who was lying on the sofa in a white dressing-gown, smoking a cigarette. She was pale with a feverish flush on her cheeks; and her eyes still shone with a strange glow. How beautiful she was, he thought! Her yellow silk dress with its collar of Venetian lace hung over a chair-back, and in the subdued lamplight some jewels gleamed on a chest of drawers.

"Well, it went off very well? Don't you think so?" he said questioningly.

"They were nice people," she said, still smoking.

He began to unfasten his dressing-gown, revealing a wide shirt-front with diamond studs and a white tie. He undressed and then sat on the edge of the bed for a little while, looking questioningly at her; but she went on smoking and took no notice of him at all.

"You dance splendidly!" he said with a smile.

"I 've never really learned."

"Did you notice how the men admired your dress?" he said, smiling like a pleased child.

"But what about the ladies? I heard well enough what they whispered behind my back."

"What did they say?" His eyebrows contracted anxiously.

"Oh, it does n't matter what they said; but I heard it, and I sha'n't forget it."

"Are n't you coming to bed now?" He swung his feet upon the bed and drew up the clothes. Outside, the wind began to howl, and the snow was driven lightly against the windows.

There was a pause. She turned her eyes toward him, and after a little she said:

"If I were to tell you of those who 've offended me most deeply, would you make them apologize?"

"Need you ask!" And he smiled reproachfully at her. "What 's the matter?"

She still looked at him. He tried to appear

interested, but he had been dancing, poor man, and he could scarcely keep his eyes open. She could hardly help laughing.

"No," she thought. "It will have to be done some day."

During the five months they had been married, she had again and again put off doing anything. While they were on their two months' honeymoon abroad, she had thought. "Not until we get home." And when they came home, she first wanted to put her house in order. She would not confess to herself that this exceedingly kind, adoring husband acted upon her as a warm fire does on any one coming in to it out of the cold. He aroused good feelings in her. It was something new, too, suddenly to find that there was some one for whom she was everything. She became powerless. In the light of his happiness her evil feelings crept into hiding, and it was only when she began to discover various faults in him that they crept out again. Then she awoke to a thousand self-reproaches, but still put off

and put off. It was delightful to be carried, and she feared the moment when she should wake up completely.

"Are n't you coming to bed at all to-night?" he asked.

"Yes," she thought, turning over on her side, "I 'll do it now!"

She began casually, looking up at the smoke from her cigarette.

"I say dear! There 's something you 've never told me."

"Is there?" he said in a sleepy voice.

She went on smoking. "Tell me how it happened that I came here to you." She pretended to shut her eyes but could see every feature in his face.

"I 'm sure I 've told you that a thousand times."

"No, indeed, you have n't. You hide everything from me."

He laughed. "I 've certainly nothing to hide, my dear. I wrote to my friend, Professor Gregersen, and asked him if he could

get me a Norwegian housekeeper. That 's all."

"But why did you choose the professor to carry out a commission like that?"

She opened her eyes and pretended to look at him for the purpose of smiling.

"Dear me, my love, when he was from the same town as I, and we were friends from boyhood, was n't it natural that I should happen to mention it in a letter to him? But are n't you coming to bed?" he added a little fretfully.

She threw away her cigarette. She had to put great restraint upon herself to keep from starting up in a fit of uncontrollable rage; but she forced herself to smile and look up at the ceiling.

"Well," she said, shaking her head in wonder. "A professor like that at a lying-in hospital is sure to have a great many strange women to look after, is n't he?"

"Yes, of course he is."

She glanced at him and trembled with excitement.

"Suppose he 'd sent you one of those!"

He yawned. "What an idea!"

No! This man knew nothing; and in order to feel the last remnant of doubt swept out of her soul, she went to him, and, seating herself on the edge of the bed, she took his head between her hands and smiled down at him affectionately. He was pleased and tried to draw her toward him, but she laughingly resisted.

"Do you know, my dear, you 're a most remarkable husband!"

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are," she went on with rash daring. "You don't care to know anything about me, and you never ask about my past life."

A pained expression passed over his face.

"No; you 've always been so reserved about yourself. But I 'm glad to have you for my own just as you are," he went on, stroking her hair. "I can't expect to have everything; but

when we get to know one another perfectly, and you have more confidence in me, it will all come of itself."

He looked at her with happiness in his eyes, and again his few loving words took effect, and made her heart glow and a sob rise in her throat; but she controlled herself and blurted out what she still had to say.

"Do you know, I think your unmarried sister in Christiansand ought to adopt a child! It must be sad to be always alone."

Once more she saw every line in his face and added with a smile:

"When we go to Norway in the summer, I suppose we shall visit your sister, sha'n't we?"

"Yes, she 'll be pleased if we do, and then you can suggest about the child to her." And he laughed—a genuine, honest laugh.

She no longer had any doubt. He knew nothing, and his sister—no, it was not she.

She began to undress, and by the time she got into bed, Flaten was snoring. She lay

there, looking at his large fat head as he slept. The dancing had been too much for him, and indeed, at dinner, when the idea occurred to her that they should try after coffee to dance the ghosts out of the rooms up-stairs, he had opposed it as long as possible.

But now this matter was cleared up. When they stood before the altar, she had strengthened herself with the thought that he was her rescuer, the man who could open for her the way out of her misery. And now? Now there was only his wealth left. But he himself?

The lamp cast a greenish tinge over his face. His Adam's apple moved with every breath he drew, and she lay looking at it and at his fat throat. Had she once more acted at a moment when her judgment was blinded with despair, and would she now wake up aghast at what she had done? Suppose this marriage did not lead a single step nearer to her goal, but that instead she was only wasting time, and growing indolent from her easy life, or letting herself be vanquished by his constant care and

affection. Perhaps they had reckoned on this, they who stole her child. Perhaps this marriage was part of their calculation. And they were not mistaken.

"No, they will be right!" cried a voice within her. "You 're going to sleep and forgetting the most sacred object in your life. If one only pats your cheek you 're submissive at once and forget all the ignominy of yesterday. They were not mistaken. You 're a miserable creature!"

Outside the winter wind was rising and howled dismally through the night.

II

When Regina was drifting into marriage with Flaten, she was not equal to considering how she was to get away from him again; but now this question could no longer be kept down. If she did not intend to give up the thought of some day finding her child, of being able to throw off her mask and be honorable and true again, she must find some means of freeing herself. Her husband was no longer her rescuer; he was not merely superfluous, but he stood in her way. There was nothing to be learned through him, but he bound her fast.

During the dark winter days she walked alone through the large rooms while Flaten was at his office. All work dropped from her hands, because it reminded her of Flaten and her marriage. When it began to grow dark, she would wait for him; but when the time

for his coming approached, she dreaded it, for it was his affection and care that disarmed her and set her at variance with herself. What was she to do? Week followed week, and she was letting the time run from her without raising a finger.

To her mother she now wrote short, almost businesslike letters, and instead of loving words she inclosed a bank-note. Her mother's letters to her she put in her pocket and often did not open for weeks. Her mother's handwriting was like a face into which she was ashamed to look.

During the dark mornings she sat in the boudoir, which had now become hers, and passed the time in drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. The firelight was reflected in the silver tea-pot and the pretty china, and the smoke spun fine blue threads about the little dark room.

But while she again and again put off taking any action, she was beginning to lose herself in beautiful dreams about her child, for they

were the cause of no wrong-doing and gave her no bad conscience. When at last she found her son, what an education she would give him! She saw herself as his proud, gray-haired mother, and him as a prominent man, whom every one respected and loved. They would live abroad, and she would take her maiden name and call herself Fru Aas, and the boy should also bear her name. She closed her eyes and pictured her life with him in a villa on the Mediterranean, where she had a large flower-garden, and cultivated only such flowers as she loved. In the evening, when the moon hung above the dark cypresses, they would sit on a balcony and sing the songs of their own country. She walked up the church aisle on his arm, while the organ tones filled the great building; but now she felt only joy. All her sins were expiated, and she lived the pure, self-denying life of a nun.

At the sound of Flaten letting himself in with his latch-key, she would start up. The dream was gone; the reality had come. How

long would this last? How long was she to feign an affection that made her more and more loathsome to herself, and gave her the feeling of not being one bit better than a street-walker.

She sat here and soothed herself with dreams and empty intentions, and the time was passing, passing. What if her child were ill? It would be eighteen months old now, and could talk, and had teeth; and she was still here! Yes, she even found herself taking pleasure in trying on new dresses before the mirror, just as if they had not been bought with the price of her shame.

She began to have recourse to opiates in order to sleep. The next day she would be so pale and languid that she began to stay in bed until about midday; and she gradually so lost command of herself that her terrible depression was often apparent. Flaten took it, however, in his usual indulgent way. He knew that young women in an interesting condition may be almost insane, and he hoped that this

explained her mood; and he lived in anticipation of the happy moment when she would come and whisper in his ear that he was going to be a father.

His indulgence began to irritate her. She dreaded every caress because she feared it would go to her heart and make her powerless once more. The night in the bedroom which they shared began to be a torture; and when he was away on his customary visits to Gothenburg, she sometimes found herself wishing that an accident would happen to him, and then, with closed eyes, picturing to herself the moment when she should be free. A week later the child would be lying on her lap, and she would be able to begin a new life, throw off this loathsome mask, and be herself once more.

Flaten came home, however, uninjured, smiling and impatient to take her in his arms, and always with some present for her. This man, who was so capable and wise among men, had suddenly become blind before a young wife. His presents felt like fresh ties, fresh

humiliations; but she took them, and smiled so as not to burst into tears, and thanked him to prevent herself from throwing them in his face. And the time passed.

She thought and considered and pondered all day long; but every road to her goal lay through Flaten's happiness. It was ridiculous to think of confiding anything to him; but to continue this life——

She began to be afraid of her own dreams. They were gloomy, they dripped with blood, and she awoke from them in a cold sweat, but glad that they were only dreams; and as if in expiation she would creep over into his bed and caress him.

One morning when he was sitting on the edge of her bed before going to his office, he could contain himself no longer.

"I say," he said, "you 're beginning to show suspicious signs now."

A tremor passed through her. Had she spoken in her dreams? Did he guess her thoughts?

He bent down and whispered in her ear, "You 're not thinking of bringing us a little heir, are you?"

She nearly burst into a scornful laugh. What next, indeed? Yes, that would be the last straw!

Then the idea came to her that she would make a fool of him, and she forced herself to smile as she said, "How you do guess everything!"

He crushed her in an embrace and almost danced out of the room. He gave more and more time to his work, for he now had to make a fortune for his heir.

He talked in season and out of season about their bright hope. It made him even more indulgent and more enamoured; and she allowed herself to be drawn into conversation about this child because she did not now feel inclined to confess the untruth, and because she began to find amusement in making a fool of him. Some day it must of course be discovered; but before then some way out of the difficulty

would perhaps be found, and indeed it must be found!

She began to walk as if asleep. She felt herself drifting toward something dark, and she tried to resist. When going about the house by herself, she would often stop and make a movement with her hand as if to drive something unpleasant away from her sight.

The more she felt herself sinking, the more did she cling to the thoughts about her child. She saw it ill, with no one to tend it; she saw it with its arms round the neck of the woman she hated; she went through the scene when she would enter and take it back; she began to hear its voice, to see its features, its smile, its hands stretched out to her; but they were stretched out in vain, for she was still here.

It began to lie on her arm at night; it crawled about the floor in the day; it became so uncannily alive that when she passed through a door she would suddenly turn to see that it had not its fingers between the door and the jamb.

Christmas was approaching. The sun was

still up for a little and shone upon snowy fields and white woods. A train passed far down in the valley, and, farther up, the roads from the factories by the river crossed one another. The trees in the garden were white and bent beneath a glittering covering of snow. No visitors ever came now, because Fru Flaten was at home to no one and never went out. One day resembled another. Flaten worked later and later in the evening, for coming home was no longer the pleasure that it had been.

Again and again Regina would get up in the morning with the thought: "To-day it must be done! I cannot go on with it any longer!"

She might run away, but then she would only be where she began. She might ask for a divorce, but she was not equal now to setting about anything so complicated. Sometimes she would have a vague fancy that her husband's money was not at all necessary; but she suspected that at the back of this there was remorse, and behind that some kind of a revolution, so that she would have to begin

from the beginning again. She was not equal to that. Many layers had formed over the first step, and she could not bring herself to throw it all away. It was better not to look back at all, not to think, only to hasten on—on.

She found herself often thinking about the various causes of death, and each time it horrified her less. One particular thought had become fixed in her mind, and acquired more and more power: "Would it not be better to commit one crime, and thus free myself and find my child? I could then at once reform, whereas now I am committing crimes endlessly, all to no purpose."

One day she surprised Flaten standing in front of his first wife's portrait, which now hung in his study and was no longer draped with crape. His expression as he stood there looking at it was unmistakable.

Regina looked at him with a satirical smile, and the old man reddened as though he had been detected in wrong-doing. She now noticed, however, that he was strangely pale

and that his big, portly figure seemed to have shrunk. How old he looked! How thin and white his hair had grown, and his face so sallow!

For a moment she was touched. "Good heavens!" she thought. "How I must have worried and tormented him!" And she felt compelled to be kind and affectionate to him for that one day more.

Not long after she became aware that she was once more about to become a mother. This was something that she had all the time considered to be quite impossible; and for several days she kept her bed, struck down, as it were, by an enemy that had attacked her in the rear. She had, it was true, fallen low, but her maternal feeling had hitherto been sacred and unstained, and the thought of her offspring had been like a little temple in which she sought shelter. But now? Now?

And this man, against whom she was sinning, who was her bad conscience, whom she was ready to kill—he was compelling her to

bring another Flaten into the world, one who would perhaps arise some day and avenge his father! Who could tell? And perhaps this child, whom she was to bring into being and to suffer for, would push aside her first child and chain her to Flaten for life.

She lay tossing and turning in her bed. It was as though the last remnants of warmth had turned to ice, and a fierce, impatient hatred began to run through her being like a fever.

III

When she came down-stairs again, she was pale and worn with sleeplessness, but strangely calm. It was as though the whole world had been killed, and only one thing left alive; she saw and gazed at only one thing. Who would stop her now? She went about the house in the morning with compressed lips, now and then putting her hand to her forehead.

At dinner, however, she was in good spirits, which made Flaten happy, and they talked gaily on all manner of subjects while they ate and drank.

Suddenly she broke off the conversation and fixed her eyes on him. He stopped speaking and looked at her as though in expectation of something.

"I say," she began. "I 'll tell you something now that you don't know."

"Indeed?" he said, still looking at her.

"I 'd had a child before I came to you."

She spoke the words monotonously, her lips smiling stiffly. Flaten dropped his spoon into his plate with a start and turned pale.

"What?" he at length exclaimed, his eyes fixed upon her. "What did you say?" And he repeated in a whisper, "What did you say?" while he tried to smile as if it were all a joke.

But she reiterated with frigid calmness, "I said that I 'd had a child before I came to you."

He was still gazing at her, and when at last he began to suspect that it was true he suddenly seemed to collapse and looked at her with dull eyes as though she were a long way off. For some time there was silence, and then finally he rose and left the room with faltering steps, which sounded fainter and fainter as he passed through the various rooms toward his study.

Regina suddenly put her hands over her ears, as if expecting to hear a report; but none came. Then she, too, rose and went into her own sitting-room, where she lighted a cigarette.

A moment later the housekeeper appeared, to ask whether her master and mistress were not going on with their dinner.

"No," said Regina calmly, busied with her cigarette. "You can clear away."

The housekeeper withdrew, and Regina lay down on the sofa and watched the clouds of smoke as they ascended. She was trembling from head to foot. What had she done? What would happen now?

A dizziness came over her, as though she were standing on the edge of a yawning abyss, and once more she clung to the thoughts of her child, taking it on her knee, seeing it smile, and imagining the moment when she would at last see it and take it up in her arms. As usual these imaginary scenes had the effect of diverting her thoughts, until at last, filled with tenderness, there seemed to be only one thing in the world that she saw or felt or knew.

There was a terrible stillness in the big house. Even the maids in the kitchen felt they must speak in whispers. The twilight penetrated

into the rooms, filling the corners, and gradually blotting out from the walls the light reflected from the snow. And here she lay. What had she done? The child? Yes, of course; but what had she done?

After two or three hours had passed she could bear it no longer, and, taking off her shoes, she crept up to Flaten's door. There was not a sound to be heard, and she could not refrain from putting her eye to the keyhole. Then she saw him sitting in front of the window, a dark, blurred form against the dim light, bowed over his writing-table. He seemed to be sitting with his head supported by his hands.

She returned to her sofa, but she could not get the scene out of her mind. That splendid man! That splendid man! What had she done? But the next moment she started up and sat with her hands clasped convulsively. "Let 's have no more of this sentimentality!" she said to herself. "Do you want to go on living here in this misery, and let your child

still be cared for by strangers? Do you want to carry with you still the disgrace that you 've been thrown into? Have n't you had enough yet?"

She began to pace up and down the room, the sound of her footsteps deadened by the carpet. It was now quite dark, and she was cold; but she continued to walk up and down, up and down, until at last, worn out, she went to bed.

IV

Flaten went out later in the evening, but in the middle of the night, when Regina had just dropped asleep for a moment, she awoke to find him standing by her bedside, whispering to her. He was fully dressed and held a lamp in his hand, and he looked as if he had shed tears.

"Regina!" he said, putting down the lamp and taking her hand. "You should have told me this before, but it cannot be helped now." He sighed. "I will try to forgive you; I will pray to God for power to do so; for I love you so!" His voice grew husky, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you!" she whispered, with her eyes fixed on the wall for a few moments. Then she closed them.

She was no longer touched by these assurances of affection, this infinite forbearance.

"When an old man takes a young wife, he himself becomes a slave," she thought with a rising feeling of contempt. "But it sha'n't succeed! No, he shall not succeed!"

The lamp was extinguished and the night-lamp lighted, but she lay with obstinately closed eyes. He might think she was asleep or that she lay there thinking, whichever he liked. But long after he got into bed, she could hear him sighing.

On the following day he went as usual to his office. Was he going to work in order to forget? During the next few days his child-like good nature once more had a bewildering effect upon her, and a voice within her cried louder and louder: "I cannot bear to hurt this man! I cannot bear it!"

It looked as if the matter were to be passed over without any further explanation. He simply forgave and did not want to know any more or mention it again.

Once more, however, the thought of the child she had been made to bear him enraged her, and

she took another step, with closed eyes, as it were and hands held over her ears. They were sitting at dinner and were engaged in a violent dispute on the question of an invitation to two or three business friends who had come up from Gothenburg. Of late he had begun to be nervous and was easily angered. All at once she broke off and began, "I say!"

He looked at her questioningly. There was a pause, and then she went on coldly:

"There 's still something I have n't told you. I killed that child we were speaking about."

He was just raising his glass to his lips but suddenly opened his eyes wide and dropped the glass on the floor. He tried to laugh, but the next instant, bringing his hand down upon the table with such force that the glass and silver rang, he shouted, "No, this is beginning to be too much!"

With a threatening look he came round the table. She jumped up and crouched like a cat that is about to spring, her eyes fixed

upon his throat as though she saw something pierce it.

He seized her roughly by the arm and shouted into her face: "It 's a lie, Regina! Say at once that it 's a lie!"

She tried hard to free herself. "No!" she said. "I tell you that I killed it. You never asked, you know, who I was!"

He suddenly let his hands fall, as though struck with shame at his roughness, then raised them to his head, and at last, after standing thus for a little while, whispered: "You 'll send me out of my mind, Regina! Do you want to kill me?" and then went slowly out of the room. Again the footsteps passed across the floor from room to room, and again the door of his study was closed.

And again she passed the afternoon on the sofa smoking cigarettes, one after another, to calm her excitement. Again they had left the table in the middle of dinner, and again the house was as silent as the grave. This time the housekeeper did not come to inquire.

The twilight came again, and with it a fresh suspense as to what would now happen; and as before she had recourse to the old means of keeping herself up, clinging to the purpose in all this, to the child for whose sake she now lay rolling in the mire. As usual, her mind was soon filled with beautiful pictures of this child; in the midst of crimes it had the power to kindle in her heart the flame of tenderness, so that all fear, all consciousness of her evil actions, stole away like frightened shadows. She felt strangely calm as she lay smoking on the sofa, regardless of the passing hours; but she dared not let the visions of her child slip from her, and clung more and more convulsively to ever-fresh pictures, with the feeling that if she let go she would be hurled into an abyss.

Hours passed. She heard Flaten pacing up and down his study—up and down, up and down, without ceasing.

That night she lay and waited in vain for him to come, and the next morning she re-

mained in bed, trembling with suspense. Had anything happened? And if so, what?

At last the housekeeper came up with a message from Flaten, saying that he had left early that morning for Gothenburg.

Throughout the day Regina was tormented with a fresh suspense. Would he return? What would happen? Or would anything at all happen?

She did not get a letter from him until the next morning. It had been written at night and covered many sheets. She read it in her bedroom, but it seemed to have no meaning for her. This wounded, despairing affection—what concern was it of hers now? When she had read three pages describing his grief and pain, she shrugged her shoulders. Then came several pages of self-reproaches, then more pages expressing hope that after this they might begin a new life in mutual understanding and trust. He forgave her this time, too, and could even realize how a desperate woman might commit such an act. He went on to say

that he himself was in need of God's forgiveness, then that she was the mother of their child, this child that he had always longed for; and finally he told her that he was coming home on the following day.

Regina dropped the letter into her lap. In her present condition of mind, all this made no impression upon her; but gradually two things stood out clearly before her mind's eye: he spoke of their child, and he was coming home to-morrow.

To-morrow? She started up. To-morrow? Was he coming here? And perhaps he would take her into his arms and speak about love, about their child, about forgiveness, about God! No, she could not stand it! It must not happen!

She hastily made her way to her boudoir, stumblingly, as though moving in the dark. Here she rapidly wrote a few words on a sheet of paper, and placing it in an envelope, rang the bell and gave orders that the letter should be taken to the station, in order that it might

go by the first train. The whole thing was accomplished in a few seconds, and she threw herself into a chair and breathed freely.

The words she had written were:

Dear Andrew:

It is time that you knew everything. You are not the father of the child I bear.

This would surely be enough. It was a fresh falsehood with which she was disgracing herself, but it was also a fresh stab in his heart. Would it be sufficient?

She started up and wandered through the rooms, and involuntarily she began to look at her hands. In the dining-room she met the housekeeper coming to tell her that a man was at the door with a calf for sale. "Very well," said Regina composedly. "Buy the calf if it 's quite fresh." When she was alone again she recommenced her wanderings, now and then sitting down only to start up again, taking things up in her hand and dropping them again, but finally sinking into a chair, with her eyes gazing straight before her.

Ah, this way of killing him was after all the worst she could have chosen! But she had to run no risks and must not have blood upon her hands. Every time she struck him to the earth, he rose and came toward her with affection in his glance. It was unbearable, but she must, she must be hard. There must be an end of this.

This time she did not resort to her fancies about the child, for she felt that to place it in front of her when engaged in an evil action would be to make a wrong use of it. No, she would now take the whole blame upon herself, would feel like a murderess, would let all the terrors of conscience overwhelm her; but the child should be kept clean and raised high above it all.

The afternoon wore away and twilight descended; the pictures on the wall began to look down at her as if out of the darkness; the big empty rooms began to be filled with terrors. She could hear the rattling of cups

and plates out in the kitchen, but it was far away, and she dared not stay here alone.

Suddenly a thought struck her. "If it happens, it will happen this evening, and then there must be nothing strange in my appearance, there must be nothing to excite ill-natured remarks; for the sake of my child there must be nothing."

She rang for the housekeeper and suggested, in the gayest of voices, that they should go for a walk together. She dressed, and, going out on the broad steps, she stood there waiting for her companion. The air was mild, and the snow was sliding down in masses from the roofs. In the courtyard, foot-paths ran like black lines across the gray carpet of melting snow.

The two women set off up toward the woods. The exertion of climbing the hills, and the warm, moist air, brought a color into Regina's cheeks. They often stopped to take breath but

kept up a lively conversation on all kinds of subjects. Regina became gayer and gayer.

The snow had been cleared from the middle of the road and lay piled along the sides in ridges of the height of a man. Now and then they met a sledge with jingling bells. Above the dim snowy landscape hung a dark, woolly sky, with here and there a rift through which gleamed a yellow star. Below in the valley could be seen the lights in the scattered farms, and the long rows of still brightly illuminated windows in the factories, whose chimneys sent up thick, coal-black volumes of smoke.

They turned into the wood, where the heavy timber loads had furrowed the narrow road. The branches of the firs met above their heads, and the road seemed to lose itself in the darkness. The housekeeper began to be afraid and wanted to turn back, but Regina laughed. "No," she said, "we 'll see whether there are n't bears here." Her companion began to tremble, and Regina's merriment increased. Now and then they startled a bird, which flew off with a

flapping of wings that brought down showers of snow from the branches.

At last they had to return. When they reached home Regina felt pleasantly tired, but when she sat alone at the table in the large dining-room her hands began to tremble, and a cold feeling of fear made her shiver. "Now he has my letter!" she thought. "Now he 's read it." She helped herself to wine and drank a glassful; but she still felt cold and drank several more. At last she began to see everything in a mist, all except one thing—a big head, with white hair and a gray mustache. It was up on the wall, and when she turned round it was on the other wall, too. Suddenly she started up and put her hands to her head. "No!" she whispered, with her gaze fixed upon the lamp. "I won't go mad! I won't! There 's nothing here to be afraid of. There 's nothing at all on the wall over there!"

After she was in bed she groped for, and found, her little glass on the table by her bed.

She must have taken a large dose of the

narcotic, for she did not wake until late the next morning; and she had had no dreams but had only fancied herself down in a black, scorching darkness.

She lay for some time, waiting for she knew not what, then rang and asked the maid if any telegram had come, but none had arrived. She put on a dressing-gown, and with her thick, dark hair falling about her shoulders, began to walk up and down, feeling heavy-headed and sick after the narcotic. She drew back the curtains to find the rain falling fast and a gray mist hanging low over the valley. What would happen? What would happen to-day?

There was a knock at the door, and she turned and leaned against the bed for support; but it was only a maid with the usual morning cup of coffee, and Regina dismissed her.

The day wore on, and at last she began to expect him home. Of course he would come, perhaps with a present for her.

Early in the afternoon she was standing on

the balcony of her bedroom in the same negligée attire when she caught sight of a telegraph-boy coming up the drive. For a moment she leaned against the railing, then turned hastily, and getting into bed drew the clothes over her.

The housekeeper came up with the telegram. It was from the hotel-keeper where Flaten was staying and stated that Flaten had been taken seriously ill in the night.

When Regina was alone again, she lay with her hands covering her face. Something deep down in her being was stirring and trying to rise, but the barriers of ice against which it pressed were too thick, and it sank back again.

"Well," she thought. "I must bear this sensibly as it ought to be borne. It will probably be the last time I shall have to wear a mask. He is dead, of course."

When she had more or less regained her composure, she sent for her husband's head clerk and told him that as she herself was ill

she would like him to go down and see Flaten and telegraph to her at once.

When he was gone she lay motionless, staring straight before her, hour after hour. In her thoughts she was once more an innocent young girl, wandering about the little island off the coast; and she could see it all, and her mother, and the church. And now! Was it all a dream, and was it impossible to wake?

She tried to think of her child, but now it seemed to be hiding its face from her. What had she done? Suppose she were to die suddenly! O God! She tossed restlessly from side to side. But could she pray? No, no! she must first see it all accomplished, and then afterward everything should be restored.

In the evening a long telegram came from the head clerk announcing that Flaten was dead. It had been a stroke. He had himself arranged that his body should be cremated without any ceremonious funeral.

"Oh," thought Regina, looking vacantly before her. "He would not trust me with his

burial. Well, perhaps he was right. But a stroke? That, of course, is a made-up story, but I shall certainly not inquire into it. Let it be a stroke. There are so many deaths from that."

V

So Regina wore her mask for the last time when she attended the simple funeral in Gothenburg. There were some business friends present, but no one from Norway, no relations. She had quite forgotten to inform his two sisters.

For Regina everything was in a mist. She could have feigned illness and not have come, but she thought that would be letting herself off too easily. Now that the victory was hers, she felt strangely impelled to punish herself and to pay back some of her debt, as it were.

When she saw her husband's coffin about to be committed to the flames, she turned faint and broke into uncontrollable weeping and had to be taken out. Soon after, the ceremony was all over and people began to go, merely raising their hats to her as she stood leaning on the head clerk's arm, with emotion showing in her face.

The same afternoon she was in the train on her way home. As they left Gothenburg, the beautiful entrance to the harbor was half hidden by the winter fog, in which the numerous islands and rocks showed only as dark, indistinct spots. Involuntarily her eyes turned in the direction of the crematorium. A white smoke was ascending from it and mingling with the heavy atmosphere that hung over the town; but that white smoke might have nothing to do with Flaten's body.

Opposite to her sat the head clerk. He occasionally made some remark, but she did not hear it. She would not think; she would close her eyes and remain torpid. There was something dangerous, deep down in her soul, that must not be allowed to wake up and get out. If only the time would pass! If only the time would pass!

At last she was alone in the great house and owned everything. The head clerk was managing the business until her lawyer could arrange for the sale of the whole.

But still she was not free. Although everything in it reminded her of Flaten, she felt herself chained to this house as long as his child was still unborn. Until then it was impossible to begin to look for her own little boy; the very thought disgusted her. But that would not be until toward the end of March, and how could she possibly make the time pass!

And this child of a man whom she had killed; this child she was condemned to bear, to give life and nourishment to. She had committed crimes, and she was ready to commit more, but before this she stood powerless, with a feeling that there was something supernatural behind it. She felt sure it would be a boy, that he would grow up to be the exact image of his father, and that one day he would come and call her to account. Well, so be it! True, there was still time for this being to be rendered harmless; but that again would be too easy a way of being let off. This unborn child was to be her stern judge, but in the meantime it was so defenseless that she could not

but protect it and think of it with a certain measure of tenderness. So be it! She bowed her head and shuddered, but so must it be.

She engaged a companion, who slept in her room at night; and she invented a thousand ways of making the time pass. The little being in her womb grew and grew, and absorbed more and more of her strength, and occupied an ever-increasing place in her life. Every sign it gave of an independent existence was like a new message from Flaten, from the inevitable fate that would some day overtake her.

To keep herself up she clung more and more convulsively to her dreams about her own little boy in Norway, whom she would soon find. This dear child, for whose sake she had trodden such miry roads, began now to rise above the gloom with which she was surrounded, like a rescuing angel whose hand she would some day grasp. When he became a man, and she could cling to his arm, then all the powers of retribution might come, for she would have her defender. He would say: "It was for my sake

my mother did it all; she acted out of love. It was for my sake, and I take it all upon myself."

The days became weeks, and the weeks months, and the winter dragged on, with fresh falls of snow and howling storms. Every day she went through the same struggle to conjure up her dream and her saving hope so vividly that the darkness should not overwhelm her, nor her terror break loose. Her face was pale and hard. She no longer wore a mask of cheerfulness, but she still kept her sorrow hidden from view. If she were to begin to speak, who would understand? But now she would soon be able to say, "Next week!"

At last the baby lay upon her lap. It was a boy. She could not feel pleased about it now, even though she was rich. She looked into its eyes and tried to smile, but she felt a strange coldness at her heart. It had such strange eyes, this baby!

With the same desire for self-torture, she would not rear it by hand but nursed it herself. Worn out with the long period of mental ex-

citement through which she had passed, it seemed as if her warmest blood were being sucked out of her veins, and every time she collapsed when it was over. But it must be so. She would give this child every advantage in her power, for it had its great mission in the world. It must be so.

Every day, in the gray wintry light from the window, she sat looking down at the child at her breast, her back becoming more and more bent as the baby continued to suck; but as the long weeks passed, the little one throve.

One day Regina received a letter from the little town in which her mother had lived since her widowhood, to tell her that her mother was dead. She laid the letter down and sat looking straight before her. She felt no great sorrow, for she did not seem to have room for it, and of late her mother's image had become curiously vague; but her thought as she sat there was: "Well, now I 'd better find my little boy, or else I shall be quite alone in the world."

In the middle of May she took her child to a home in Gothenburg, where she placed it under the constant supervision of a medical man.

Then she breathed freely. Her property was sold, and she was the owner of something like a million *kroner;* but her hair was streaked with gray, and her face was like that of a consumptive.

BOOK THREE

I

In the summer of 1880 the following unusual advertisement appeared in the Christiania papers:

> In the month of March, two years ago, a lady and gentleman came to the Lying-In Hospital and took a child for the purpose of adopting it. A large reward is offered to any one who can give information as to who these people were, and where they are now. Address R, care of this paper.

It was June now, and under the pale-green leafage of the Students' Grove, a young woman, dressed in black, might often be seen in the middle of the day, walking up and down among the promenaders, but always alone. She was one of those strangers to the town who, one can see, have nothing to occupy them. She saw people greeting one another, but no one greeted her. She sat down on one of the empty benches when she was tired of walking, and she got up again when she was tired of

sitting. Sometimes, as she sat, she wrote a name in the dust with the point of her sunshade; but she carefully obliterated it before she left. The band played, and old people and young walked about together and laughed; but to her it was all remote, and glided past as something with which she had no concern. She looked at her watch; it was nearly time for dinner at the hotel, and then there would be another afternoon to idle away until six, when she could start on a fresh round of the newspaper offices and hear whether there were any letters for her.

Regina led the life of a rich stranger in a hotel. When her bill was brought to her, she saw that she had already been there a month. Well, she had time at her disposal, and something might happen to-day or to-morrow; there was nothing for it but to wait patiently, for a letter must come some day. At table she made half-acquaintances, with whom she talked on indifferent matters, but with that exception she lived as it were behind a wall.

Now that she could throw off her mask and be herself once more, she could not find herself; and, besides, had she not still within her things that must be hidden at all costs?

She had confided the story of her child to the lawyer who managed her affairs, and he, too, had taken steps to find it; but at the same time he had made it clear to her that it was with the play of chances she would have to reckon. The child might be dead, or the adoptive parents dead or emigrated; or one of the parents might have died, and the other married again and had a child, and the adopted child might then have fallen into other hands. She might meet it any day in a perambulator in the street but not know that it was hers. It might be crawling about in the dirt of a back yard because it had passed through so many hands since it left the hospital. It might have found a refuge on a farm in a mountain valley, or out on some island; no one could tell. But supposing it were still the adopted child of wealthy parents, then the

parents would long since have grown accustomed to regard it as their own and would be unhappy if they lost it. Why, then, should they reveal themselves, even though they knew that a strange woman with whom they had no concern was seeking for the child? From a legal point of view it was theirs; she had given it up of her own free will. In any case she had better be prepared to wait. Advertising might possible lead to something.

"Well," thought Regina, "then I must wait." And while she waited she went over in her mind all these chance possibilities. The lawyer ascertained that neither the aunt in the Mjösen district nor the aunt in Nordland had an adopted child. This reduced the number of possibilities. Every morning when she rose she could not help trembling with excitement. What would happen to-day? But the days passed, and nothing happened.

Her life in Sweden was like a bad dream, and she tried to shut it out of her memory, to live only in the future, and to dream the

old dreams of the moment when she would once more be united to her child. It began to be a religious idea, and it seemed to her that the finding of the child was the same thing as finding peace and salvation for her soul. With the child she would become a new being, repent the evil she had done, have her sins forgiven, and then only do good to everybody, everybody, and not even ask for thanks.

Time was passing, however, and the fortune that she had purchased so dearly had effected nothing. Her faith began to fail, and in its place fear and unhappy recollections began to rise in her mind, but she fought against them.

At last one morning, when she entered a newspaper office, the young lady at the counter said to her with a smile, "We have something for you to-day, madam."

There were no less than two letters. Regina had to sit down while she opened them. This was a matter of life and death to her, and her hands trembled.

One of the letters was from Christiansand,

the other from Romsdal, and both stated that they had found the people in question. One of them must surely be right!

Upon Regina, worn out as she was with long weeks of suspense, the effect was almost overwhelming, and she trembled from head to foot. This time it was not fear; it was a new feeling; it was happiness. So this was what happiness felt like!

She threw some money to the girl behind the counter and hastened back to the hotel to pack. Without an attempt at order, she tossed everything into her trunk, only pausing occasionally to take breath and smile. At last her eyes filled with tears, and sitting down, she broke into sobs. So this was what happiness felt like. It seemed as if she had been made of ice before, and that the ice had now melted.

The same evening she was sitting on the deck of the Bergen steamer as it steamed down the fiord. There were many passengers, and Regina had been fortunate enough to secure a comfortable deck-chair on the saloon-deck,

in which she now sat wrapped up in a shawl.

To any one returning to his home after a long absence, the first sight of the smoke ascending from its chimneys gives the feeling of being at home. In the same way Regina now felt that she had reached her goal. She was worn out with the joy of the two hours that had passed since the first ray of light shone upon her. The child was already sitting on her lap, she heard it chatter and laugh, she lifted it up, she looked into its eyes with the blissful feeling that her sin was forgiven; she was on a new earth, beyond the reach of a bad conscience or of any of her previous actions.

It was one of those June evenings when the Christiania fiord is a fairy-land of beauty; and Regina, who that morning had been sitting as it were in a dark cellar, had suddenly become the center of this bright, beautiful summer glory. The fiord was a mirror of gold and blue, because the sky irradiated gold and blue; but both of them shone exclusively for Regina.

On the fir-clad hills running up from the water the sun showered its brightest light; and even the blue shadows along the shore were sunny. It was for her that the white villas on both shores, with their bathing-houses, were reflected in the water; it was for her that the houses on the wooded islands that they passed were flying their flags. The sun was beginning to set over Asker, surrounded by a paradise of clouds. Never had it set in such magnificence as now. She sat and looked at it all with wide-open eyes, like a beggar who has died in a garret and awakes in paradise. And all the while a strange warmth was stealing through her heart. So this was what happiness felt like; and it seemed to her that she had been happy for many years already.

The people about her were all happy and good-looking, and they looked at her kindly, just as if they knew about it too. Even the wheel-chains moving backward and forward along the bulwarks had something touching about them. The noise of the engines sounded

to her ears like a gay little song; and when finally a band began to play on the bridge she felt as if she were in a triumphal procession. A lump rose in her throat, but it would not do for her to cry here where people could see her.

Christiania began to disappear in a bank of fog at the head of the fiord. "When shall I see it again?" she thought. "First of all I shall go abroad with my child, but I may come back again, and then I 'll give money to the poor, and especially to those poor creatures in the lying-in hospital. No, my son shall do that, for every one must see how splendid he is."

The sun disappeared, the heavens sank into a pale, golden twilight, the twilight into blue obscurity. It was one of those first light nights when the landscape, with its mountains and lakes and green meadows, is distinctly visible, while the stars are scarcely to be seen. The steamer plowed its way along, with a wake of foam behind it, and soon began to rise and fall on the long waves that came in from the

sea. Far off on the horizon stood a lighthouse with a yellow, blinking eye.

The next day, in Christiansand, Regina spent some time on her toilet at the hotel, as she wanted to be clean and look nice when she took her child in her arms; but at last she ordered a carriage and drove up through the broad, bright streets to the given address. It took time, but she finally found the Fru Larsen mentioned, behind the counter in a little paper and hat shop on the outskirts of the town. She was an elderly woman, fat and gray-haired, with a toothless mouth, and small, sharp eyes. "Good heavens!" thought Regina. "It is n't possible that *she* can have had the child all this time?"

As soon as the woman heard who it was, she raised the flap of the counter and said with a smile and a nod, "Come inside, please, and then we shall be undisturbed."

She showed Regina into a dark little room behind the shop, and invited her to sit down

on the sofa, in front of which stood a large, round table, with two bowls on it, containing faded photographs and visiting-cards. Fru Larsen seated herself in a rocking-chair on the opposite side of the table, folded her hands in her lap, and began to talk about the bad times.

Regina interrupted her impatiently. "You think you know who has the child, then?" she said.

Fru Larsen rocked backward and forward, making the chair creak beneath her weight, while she gave Regina a searching glance, as though suspecting the matter to be a delicate one, and appraising her wealth.

"Well," she began at last, with her broad chin projecting, "it 's a very difficult matter. I ought n't to say anything, for I 've promised silence, but—it 's hard for a poor widow in small circumstances. My husband, let me tell you——"

Regina rose. "Can I help you in any way?"

she said. "With money, for instance. Tell me how much. But tell me what you know at once, for I 'm in a hurry."

Fru Larsen began fingering some faded ribbon bows on her dress while she spoke of her hat shop and looked melancholy. A foreign firm had threatened to present a bankruptcy petition against her, and then she would be quite destitute; but perhaps it was a dispensation of Providence, to which she must submit. Or perhaps Regina was an angel come to rescue her, for she had not omitted to pray. And she began to wipe away tears.

Regina became almost angry. "Name the amount!" she cried. "I have a little money at present, and if you can tell me where my child is, then name the amount!"

"I owe the firm five thousand kroner," said the woman, looking at Regina with an anxious smile, adding, "Of course I only meant a loan, if it was possible."

"If you let me have pen and ink, you shall have a check."

Fru Larsen rose, leaving her chair rocking; and while Regina wrote, she stood looking plaintively on and sighing. When it was done, Regina placed her hands on the other's shoulders, saying, "And who is it?"

Fru Larsen now had the check in her hands and was twisting it between her fingers; and her eyes were wet. In the first place she hoped that God would bless Regina. But now Regina could no longer control herself, and exclaimed, "If you don't tell me what you know, I 'll tear the check in half!"

This took effect. The woman folded her hands, looked away, and sighed. "Well," she said, "to tell the truth, it 's my own brother. He keeps a shop farther up the street. He 's a bad-tempered man, though I say it that shouldn't; and if it was n't for the child's sake, I should never have let it out. But you must swear to me that you won't say who put you on the track."

Regina was not listening but asked breathlessly, "And how do they treat the little one?"

"The little one? He-he! Oh, yes, it 's treated well enough as far as that goes; but it 's not a house to grow up in. I 'll just tell you what my own brother did to me——"

"Where does he live?" asked Regina, and, on being given the address, she fled.

On reaching the house, the ground-floor of which was occupied by a large grocer's shop, she stood for a moment and looked up at the first-floor windows. They had nice white curtains, and flower-pots and plants in bloom stood on the sills. There—there her child had lived all this time! It was there now. At last her sufferings would be at an end! At last!

She stumbled up the stairs and rang the bell, without considering at all how she would proceed; but it seemed an eternity before the maid came to the door.

"Is your mistress at home?" No, she was out. Was her husband at home? No, he was in Christiania. Regina's mind was made up. "Then I 'll take it at once," she said to herself, and stepping into the hall, she unfastened her

mantle, saying, "I 'll wait for your mistress." The girl showed her into a large bright room, where the air was rather close; but the next moment she heard a child's voice in the adjoining room.

Regina clasped her hands over her breast as if she feared her heart would burst; but the next moment she flew to the door, opened it, and found herself in a large bedroom, where a girl was busy with some clothes at a table and a little child was toddling about on the floor.

Regina gazed at it, said a few words to the girl, and bending down, lifted the child up in her arms; and suddenly she began to laugh, laugh like a mad woman, while she trembled from head to foot. She clasped the child tenderly in her arms and kissed its head, its face, its hair; and all the time she laughed wildly and hysterically, with the tears running down her cheeks. The child was frightened and began to scream.

At this the girl came up and took Regina by the arm. "What 's the meaning of this?"

she said. "You must n't frighten the child! Give it to me!" When Regina refused to give it up, the girl became alarmed. "What do you want with the child, then?" she demanded. "Who are you? You must be mad!"

But Regina pushed her away and laughed again. "Leave go of me!" she cried. "It 's my child."

"Your child? Are you quite out of your mind? Give me the child; do you hear? It 's frightened!"

"Yes, it is my child!" said Regina, beginning to walk up and down, hushing the little one in her arms. "Tell me what his name is! Is it Olaf? If it is n't Olaf, I 'll have him re-christened. There! There! My own dear little boy, is n't he, then?"

The girl was now quite sure that this woman was mad, and she exclaimed angrily: "He? It 's not a boy at all. It 's a girl, and her name 's Inga!"

Regina suddenly stood still, stared for a moment at the girl, and then dropped the child

to the floor. "What did you say?" she cried. "A girl? Do you want to make me believe—ha, ha! So you say it 's a girl, do you?"

"Well, you can see for yourself! But what in the name of goodness do you want here, woman? Do you want me to go and fetch some one up from the shop?"

"No, no!" said Regina in a low voice, passing her hand across her forehead; then closing her eyes she whispered: "So it 's a girl, is it? I beg your pardon, then. I 'll go. It was a—a misunderstanding. I beg your pardon." And slowly, as if in a dream, she left the room and passed down the stairs.

II

Toward midnight she found her way back to the hotel from a park where she had been sitting for several hours. It had rained, and the leaves hung glistening with moisture, and the hot streets were wet and steamy.

She had received a heavy blow and for a time had lain as it were unconscious; but then she arose, not daring to lie longer. There was a dark shadow following her, and it would get hold of her if she did not rise. She put her hand, as it were, to her head, and said: "It 's over now. It was nothing. Yes, it 's quite over now, and I must go on." She still had a letter, so that there was no reason for her to lose courage.

On her way back she began to work herself up into a feeling of pleasure and hopefulness about this letter. The day after to-morrow

she would be in Romsdal; it would be a delightful pleasure-trip; and just think! in less than two days she would certainly have her child.

She passed another night alone in a hotel in a strange town. The sun rose early: that must have been the reason why she could not sleep, or perhaps it was the buzzing of some flies, or perhaps she was thinking a little too much about Romsdal and things connected with it. Her skin was dry, her eyes smarted, her head throbbed as if from a blow received; her heavy eyelids drooped, but the scenes that passed before her mind's eye were too numerous and too vivid. Why were her feet and hands so hot?

Oh, if she could only fold her hands and pour out her heart in prayer! But in that case she would have to repent, and what if it were God's will that she should purchase forgiveness for her sin by not finding her child? She could not bear that. No, first she would find this child for whose sake she had sinned, and then—

then she could repent and weep over her sorrows.

There is a dark shadow following her and trying to get hold of her, and in order to keep it at a distance she must hope, and feel the happy assurance that she will succeed in finding this child. It keeps her pursuers at a distance. The thing is not to look back, only forward, forward.

The next day she once more set out on her travels. While the steamer was tossing off Jædren, she sat clinging convulsively to a railing on the after deck. She did not notice that she was seasick. The night would probably be bad, but the next day they would be in Bergen, and then there was the long piece in still water among the islands. It was really a pleasure-trip. They steamed along the bare, dark coast with its thousands of islands and rocks, surrounded by hovering sea-birds. Precipitous black cliffs towered into the sky, with here and there small fisher-huts in a green cleft into which the sun perhaps never pene-

trated, and a little boat moored to the foot of the cliff.

Regina sat on the deck with a small, close-fitting hat on her head, and the collar of her cape turned up. There was a strange bleakness about this gloomy scenery, and it involuntarily brought gloomy thoughts to her mind.

Supposing this journey should also prove fruitless, could she survive a fresh disappointment? She felt a choking sensation in her throat, and her heart turned cold. But when they glided into the Molde bay, it was in bright, warm summer weather, and everything was radiant as in a newly created world. All the passengers were on deck looking at the scenery. Little, gentle waves ran in toward smiling shores, where the green leafage filled the air with a cool, fresh fragrance. Above were snowy peaks that glittered against the cloudless sky. Torrents foamed out of ravines and took half the mountain in a single leap. And down in the valley, fertile farm-lands alternated with forests of fir and other trees.

Then the little town came into view, like a cluster of villas in a garden. In this air, in this glorious weather, how could Regina feel otherwise than in good spirits?

The same afternoon she took a cariole and drove out to see the farmer who had sent her the letter. She passed Englishmen trudging along the road in knickerbockers, with fishing-rod on shoulder and pipe in mouth; and tourists, in vehicles of every description, were driving along the roads in both directions, raising clouds of dust as they passed.

The boy who drove Regina knew the man she had come to see, and, after driving for an hour, turned in at a large, well-kept farm, whose white dwelling-house, large, red-painted cow-stables, and well-kept garden testified to its prosperity. The farmer was standing in his shirt-sleeves out in the yard when Regina drove in. He was a perfect giant, with a large beard, and a tiny little peaked cap surmounting a thick mane of dark hair. He had his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth.

His first glance at the new-comers was a slightly contemptuous one bestowed upon the little dun horse, which immediately began to crop the grass growing over the yard.

Finally he came forward and raised his cap to Regina, who had alighted from the cariole; and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, he asked who the visitor was.

When he heard who she was, his face assumed an expression of cunning, and he replaced his pipe in his mouth. Regina was shown into the best parlor, which smelled of paint, and where an enormous number of flies were buzzing. When she had seated herself on the sofa and a woman had brought her a glass of milk, the old man began to pace up and down the floor, clearing his throat.

Regina drank some of the lukewarm milk and began to look at him expectantly. He was holding forth on the subject of the new district magistrate. Did she know him? Well, at any rate he came from the south. But he seemed to think he could do just what he liked

with the independent peasants. The old man wiped his mouth and looked searchingly at her. Regina forced herself to nod comprehendingly. "Is that the sort of man he is?" she said.

This was sufficient encouragement for the old man, and he proceeded to enlarge upon the doings of the magistrate and all his offenses against independent peasants. It seemed to Regina that he had talked for hours, and she was scarcely listening when he said that he intended putting something in the papers about this jack-in-office.

At last she interrupted him by asking whether it were he the old man had meant in his letter.

The old man shot a glance at her out of his cunning eyes while he busied himself with the relighting of his pipe. "I have n't said it 's him," he replied. "But you can hear what he says—he, he!" And he sat down beside her on the sofa, puffing vigorously at his pipe, and gesticulating with a dark-skinned, hairy hand, of which one finger projected stiffly. "Just

hear what he says—he, he! But *I* have n't said so. *I* know nothing."

"Has he a little boy that he got from the lying-in hospital?"

"I have n't said so!" And the old man laughed, perfectly certain that he was not the sort of man to let the cat out of the bag. Nor was there, indeed, anything more to ask him.

He followed Regina out, and after she had taken her seat in the cariole he stood gesticulating with the hand with the stiff finger, while he held his pipe in the other.

"And if you can get a hold on him legally," he said, "be sure you squeeze him hard, as hard as ever you can!" And he laughed and, nodding to her, raised his little cap in farewell.

Regina was in low spirits. What was she going about like this for? After all, what the woman in Christiansand had wanted was only to injure her brother and at the same time make money; and perhaps this man had only made up the whole story in order to worry the magistrate. Should she trouble to go? Oh,

yes! she must go; there was nothing else to be done.

The little dun horse jogged quietly along. The road ran by the side of a little foaming river that was often hidden beneath thick bushes. The sun was sinking, and the dry, warm scent of the pines gave place to the cool fragrance of bird-cherry and freshly mown grass. On one side rose the steep hillside; on the other lay an undulating landscape, with farms and woodland stretching away to the other side of the valley. The road already lay in shadow, but swarms of gnats were dancing in the sunshine like gold flies. The cuckoo was calling, and the swallows darted hither and thither. From the bottom of the valley green meadows sloped upward, some lying so high that they still caught the red rays of the setting sun.

When at last she rang the magistrate's bell, Regina was trembling with anxiety. She dared not do otherwise than come, and yet she feared the blow of a fresh disappointment. She dared

not be glad, though she could not but venture to hope.

A pale-faced, elderly lady wearing a white cap opened the door. With assumed cheerfulness, Regina asked her if she could tell her of any farm-house in the neighborhood where they took in lodgers.

The lady seemed a little surprised but asked her to come in and showed her into a large bright room with windows opening into the garden and looking out over the valley toward the opposite mountains. Regina said who she was, and when they were both seated the lady gave her the names of several farms where they generally took in lodgers in the summer.

Regina tried to converse about them, but all the time she was thinking: "What shall I do? In a little while I shall have to go, and what then?" The old lady was pleasant and had a kind, winning manner, and her voice was low and clear. Regina began to be ashamed of the part she was playing and felt a desire to throw her arms round her neck and tell her

everything; but in this she was frustrated, for the old lady passed her hand over her eyes and said, "You must excuse my being rather tired."

This of course meant, "Now you must go!" Regina rose hesitatingly, and the lady added, with a sad smile, "We 've been up a good deal at night lately."

"Indeed!" said Regina, almost breathlessly.

The lady sighed. "Yes," she said. "We had a little child; and last night it died. It 's a dangerous thing this cholerine." And she took a handkerchief out of a silk bag she carried and wiped her eyes.

From long practice Regina was able to maintain an appearance of calm as she asked discreetly, "Was it a grandchild?"

"No, it was not a grandchild."

Regina held out her hand. "Well, thank you for the information you 've so kindly given me," she said. "If I 'd known, I should not have come to trouble you." She seemed about to go, but suddenly turned and said: "I once

lost a little one through cholerine myself. How old was yours?"

"Oh, only about two years old."

"Was it a poor child you had adopted?" asked Regina, saying to herself, "In another moment I shall collapse!"

But the lady answered: "Yes, we got it from the maternity hospital a couple of years ago. A housekeeper we were so fond of went to Christiania, and—well, well, there 's nothing more to be said about that now."

Regina drank in the last words with a feeling of intense relief. "He is n't dead!" was the thought that darted through her mind. "Thank God, it was not he!" Aloud she said: "Well, thank you once more. I expect I shall take rooms at one of these farms. Good-by!"

In the evening Regina sat on the balcony of the hotel, looking out over the bright landscape. In the dining-room a second supper-table had been spread, and some people came out to sit at the little tables and drink their coffee. There was noise and laughter; they

talked several languages, enjoyed themselves, ate and drank, slept soundly at night, and had no dull, heavy pain at their hearts.

Had this story about the housekeeper been made up? Did she dare believe that her own child—that it was in vain she—no, she could not bear it! If once she were certain of it—what then? Then her feet would be paralyzed, there would be nothing for her to fly to, and the evil spirits that followed close on her heels would get hold of her. Yes, then they would get hold of her!

"No, no! My little boy is alive. That was the housekeeper's child; that nice old lady would n't tell a lie. Thank goodness, I can still travel, and I 've plenty of money to travel with. Even if it 's a thorny path, I must take it. What better do I deserve? Is n't it well that I should be allowed to expiate some of my sins?"

But where should she now turn? If only she had had a single friend whose advice she could have asked, but she was separated from all

connections, alone in an entire world, with every thought imprisoned, every sorrow without a comforter. And perhaps she would be the victim of her own delusions; for how could she think clearly, consider rightly, and choose the best ways—she, who was now hardly able to keep hold of a thought?

At midnight she still sat there when every one else had gone. The town was quiet. The sound of running rivers and brooks, and the breaking of the waves on the shore, were more distinct. The night was as light as day, and the sunset clouds still glowed in the sky.

"God help me!"

She had telegraphed from Christiansand and asked to have her letters forwarded to Molde. The next day she went to the post-office and to her great surprise found two more letters from newspaper offices.

III

Of these two letters, one took her into the Trondhjem district, and the other into Nordland. On the way to the first her hope revived, and she felt happy in being able to hope once more; but she was disappointed, and it had the effect upon her of a fresh, stupefying blow. The letter from Nordland, however, seemed the most probable; and perhaps after all her aunt had something to do with this: it was in the same fiord in any case, and with renewed hope she traveled northward. Once more she was disappointed but had found a fresh clue, which she felt herself compelled to follow up.

A strange life now began for Regina. She was unable to settle down quietly but was in constant motion, traveling incessantly, alternating between disappointment and hope, again and again, each disappointment a fresh blow which she thought would be the last, but

from which she rose time after time, without rest, unceasingly.

Late in the autumn she traveled up the Gudbrandsdal to take by surprise a doctor with an adopted child. The trees by the road-side were yellow, and at the bottom of the valley the river flowed noisily between pasture and farm-lands.

When the snow lay on the ground, she was driving in a sledge along the broad roads of Toten. The bells rang out clearly through the frosty woods, and large farms with chimneys smoking stood on the snowy fields. There was a captain here, upon whom she was coming unawares. She was now fully persuaded that it was known that she was going about seeking, and that whoever had her child hid it and hid themselves, and perhaps put her on the wrong track simply out of scorn; and she began to travel about in angry impatience to find these people who had filled her life with so much anguish. She went about as it were with her hands clenched; she could not rest.

After Christmas she went by train through Österdal, looking out over the endless fir forests with their branches laden with glittering white snow. She was on her way to see a lawyer up in Tönset.

She, who had kept her secret so carefully and hidden her grief so proudly, now began to give herself away, now to one and now to another, when she thought they could help. She applied to lawyer after lawyer, and scattered money right and left. Whenever she heard a new lawyer praised for his ability, she went to him, too. They all applied to the maternity hospital, but there was nothing about the matter in the books there, for the professor was the only person who had known anything about it; and she herself could not even say what the child was called, what was the name of the adoptive parents, or where they were, whether in Norway or elsewhere.

The lawyers told her she must wait; they would work. But wait! It was just that she could no longer do. She must hasten to reach

her child before it was too late. Who could tell how long she had to live?

"No!" she said to herself at last. "I must depend upon myself. And if I 'm very sharp, I shall find it right enough."

One day she began to puzzle over an indistinct recollection from the hospital. How was it? Had she not once awakened and seen two strangers with the professor? They stood a little way off, it was true, but it was she they were looking at. What were they like? The lady? The husband? She racked her brains to recall them. This was of course the key, if she could only remember; and she tried with all her might to bring back to her mind a vivid recollection of the scene in that room. What did they look like? There stood the professor, and there stood those two. The man? His nose, beard, clothes, his hair? She would soon have him now. A day later she was sure she remembered the lady, too; she could see them both now. But where were they? The thing was now to meet them, and meet them

she would! And now that she could describe their appearance, it would be all the easier for others to help her with advice.

She fell into the hands of people who took advantage of the opportunity to extract money from her. She gave it willingly, paying often a high price for a fresh hope, even when she had a suspicion that it was false; it would give her something to travel for. The more frequent her journeys and disappointments, the more painstaking did she become with the new suggestions. They were the drops of oil that made her little flame leap up again each time it threatened to go out; they meant a further postponement, and she could go off again, and again flee from the dark shadow that followed her so closely.

One clue pointed to an engineer who had emigrated to South Africa, another to a post-office functionary who had gone to America on account of a defalcation, a third to a Norwegian consul in Australia. She succeeded at last in obtaining their addresses in order to

have them in reserve if none of her expeditions in her own country led to any result.

Weeks and months went by. Each fresh disappointment scored a new furrow in her face and added to the gray threads that streaked her once dark, abundant hair. At table in the hotels, no one could help noticing this woman dressed in black, with the pale face and the beautiful long eyelashes. Her age was not easy to determine; she might be young and she might be old; it was impossible to tell.

All that she saw and heard she connected with the one and only thing that now existed for her in the world. A chance conversation in a railway carriage might give her a good idea that led to a fresh clue, opened up a new path. Wherever she went she looked mechanically at every one she met, in the hope of finding those two whom she now so distinctly remembered; and if she found them, she would certainly not let any consideration for them stand in her way. But as time passed and she began to feel that she was approaching the brink of the

precipice at which she would be compelled to stop, give up the whole thing, and confess that she had murdered an innocent man to no purpose, she began to be more excitable and impatient on her journeys. The post-horses went too slowly, the train service was thrown out of order, and the steamers made her angry by arriving five minutes after time.

Her wealth was still hers, however, and she also had plenty of time—still, if she could only hold out.

One day she received from one of her lawyers a letter that made her for an instant quite confused. It stated that it was quite certain that her child had died when only a few months old, its adoptive parents being a magistrate and his wife in Drammen. The husband was dead, and his widow had settled abroad after his death. The lawyer was sure that this was the solution of the mystery, and he was now going to try to find the widow.

The very next day it seemed to Regina that it was altogether impossible that her child

should be dead. It was utter nonsense! Oh, these lawyers! They were never to be trusted. It might be that this one had an understanding with the people she was looking for, and only wanted to put her on the wrong scent. No, they should not succeed in making her give it up yet; indeed they should not!

She continued her journeys, but after this she opened no letters from this lawyer. She did not want to know whether he found the widow. She could not rely upon it; she must trust to herself. But while her sufferings and trouble made the child more and more precious, her ideas of it began to recede farther and farther into the region of dreams. In her imagination it stood upon a little sunny spot, a little promised land that she would one day reach and rest in forever; and at last it was in an undefinable paradise, through whose gates neither sin nor repentance could enter, where she would find salvation when once she had obtained an entrance. All she had to do was to hold out—to hold out.

At last it began to strike her that at the various places at which she had been she had not asked the right questions nor looked with sufficient keenness of observation into people's eyes when they answered. She would lie awake all night reproaching herself with not having asked such and such questions; and at last she began to go again to these people, and to others after that.

One day she received word from the lawyer that managed her affairs that Flaten's sisters had taken steps to secure the division of the estate with the boy before his mother had squandered the entire fortune. One of the sisters also asked to be allowed to take the boy and educate him. Regina agreed to everything, impatient to be left undisturbed from that quarter; but she felt it as the sign of a coming storm, the first independent communication from Flaten's son, who was growing and approaching the time, the day, when he would come. And come he would! The thing was now to make haste while there was time.

IV

Time passed. One night Regina was lying shivering between damp hotel sheets, staring into the darkness. She was not awake, but neither was it sleep in which she lay. She was traveling, but the ship went so much too slowly; she was always traveling, but the train stopped and refused to go on. No, it was not the railway this time. She was going along a road, running, but her feet were so heavy to drag along. She was out on a moor, where it was quite dark, with a yellow-gleaming, stormy sky above her, across which heavy masses of black cloud chased one another furiously. She pressed onward in the face of the cold blast. She heard footsteps behind her, footsteps she knew well, and she began to run. She dared not look behind her, and yet all the time she could see that large face with the gray mustache and the kind eyes. He did not mean

her any harm even now; he only wanted to tell her that he forgave her for this, too; she knew what he meant. "Wait a little! Don't run so fast, dear wife! I only want to kiss you and say that I forgive you everything. You are, it is true, scattering to the winds the money that I gathered together by the work of a lifetime; but it does n't matter. Don't you hear me say I forgive you?" But she ran and ran to get away from him. Above her flew a flock of birds. They were her recollections. Some called so gently, while others screamed loudly; and they would beat down on her if she stopped. She must not stop! And yet her feet would not go on; they stuck fast, and she made no progress.

She suddenly started up in bed and sprang out; and after lighting a candle, she remained sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Oh, I must have been dreaming something horrible, and it 's still only one o'clock. Why don't I change my course of life? I must shake off this nightmare! But then I shall

have to repent everything, surrender unconditionally, perhaps be willing to sacrifice the best I have. And then? Then I shall have done all this in vain; I shall be standing just where I began. No, I can't do it! I must find the boy first.

"But suppose I die to-night. To meet—*him* again, and hear from his own lips that he forgives me, will be worse than everything else. I could n't bear it! Oh, if one only knew whether there were a life after this, or whether one disappears like smoke! But no one knows! No one knows!

"This life—it 's a strangely variegated piece of work. Stitch after stitch I 've put in myself, and I hold the thread in my hand; but one mistake, and it can never be put right again; the costly embroidery is hopelessly ruined. And yet how much was my fault in the beginning? At that time, if I had had five *kroner* more, so that I could have paid the hospital, perhaps everything would have been different now.

"But it cannot be done over again! It can never, either now or hereafter, be done over again!

"I am here, and thank goodness there is still some hope. I have only to hold out a little longer. Perhaps everything will be different to-morrow, and then? Everything shall be forgotten, and I 'll give thanks and praise.

"But here I lie, letting the time pass, and perhaps he 's with that priest now! Suppose he 's ill, and will perhaps die to-night, and I 'm lying here! I must be mad!"

She started up, rang the bell, and began hurriedly to dress herself. She had to ring again, and at length a sleepy maid appeared. A carriage at once! Yes, she knew it was night, but they might take double fare. The carriage must be made ready immediately.

The silence of the night is broken by the sound of cariole wheels.

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